border line

THE Comics Magazine

November #4

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Fabian Nicieza &
Mike Carey

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Ziraldo • D'Israeli
Gerald Scarfe • Al Davison
Steve Lightle • Jeph Loeb
Ian Richardson
German Festivals
Euro Manga? • Arab Comics
Milo Manara • Kia Asamiya

Columns • Reviews
News • Views
Small Press

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Thanks to Mike (Yoof Boy Snr) Robinson, Paul (Trivia Lad) Annis and Pete (he'll be back) Ashton. Matt (D'Israeli) Brooker for helping us out in more than one place and Mike Conroy - maybe next time, eh? Cover design by the unbelievable Jim Campbell, picture by Enrico Marini – Some positive exposure!?

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INDUSTRY STANDARD

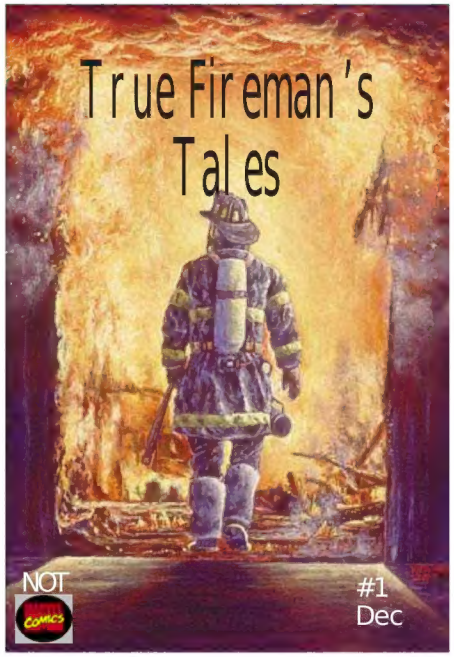
Phil Hall's look at the people and the publishers who are moving and shaking the comics industry

A FRIEND of mine, Lee "Budgie" Barnett holds a panel at the UK comics convention/festival each year called "Hypotheticals". The idea is for a panel of experts to come up with a new comics company or a new comicbook. It's a lot of fun and very popular. However, apply the same type of rules to the world today and things stop sounding quite as amusing.

I played "hypotheticals" with the US comics industry the other night, after I'd been reading about what songs radio networks had put on the "unsuitable" list, how Fox has withdrawn the *Spider-Man* movie trailer, and that Arnie Schwarzenegger's career is basically even more finished than it was before September 11. I also read Jim Steranko's diatribe and considered very carefully the consequences the cancellation of **The Authority** was ultimately going to have on the future of US superhero comics.

The best thing would be for the US industry to stay roughly the same, to let it continue to develop again, the way it last did in the Eighties; and while keeping the events of September 11th at the back of its mind, make damn sure that it doesn't cloud its judgement. The worst thing that could happen is for US comics to eventually take on an extreme standpoint, or, equally harmful, it shouldn't allow itself to be reinvented at a time when the economics just ain't good.

The last thing most of us want to see is a plethora of storylines where superheroes crack down hard on Osama Bin Laden. The consequences of that tragic, horrible day in September shouldn't really exist in mainstream US comics continuity because events like these wouldn't happen. They wouldn't be as tragic because there'd be someone to stop it and, to be brutally honest, the entire event would be dealt with in less than two pages in the average comic. Heck, Flash alone could take out every single terrorist on the face of the planet before half of us had had our breakfast. This shouldn't be a green light for jingoism, flag waving and sabre rattling.



However, tied with the above as the last thing we want is a shift away from superhero comics by sensitive publishers who decide that maybe we all need more slice of life or "True Firemen's Tales". **Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman** is a great concept, but could you imagine it if it wasn't played for laughs? This is where someone like Joe Quesada could bring his character Ash back from comics limbo – a superhero/fire-fighter who is not tied to the superhero mainstream's continuity. But I'm wandering...

Hypothetically speaking, we might be seeing the beginning of the extinction of superhero comics. It's not too far fetched an idea; after all, back in the Sixties Stan Lee knew that if his superhero experiment failed he could go back to producing mystery, western and romance comics – his bread and butter. How many western and romance comics can you name that are popular today? Mystery/horror isn't doing so well either. But it took romance comics 25 years to die, so if this were the beginning of the end, Marvel and DC might start entering into Fantagraphics' and Oni Press's markets, always with the knowledge that they can at least go back to superhero comics if all else fails, for however a limited time that might be.

What we have to hope for is that the major US comics publishers don't arbitrarily decide what's right for us on the strength of how the rest of the world might react. Second guessing public opinion isn't an exact art because there are millions of variables. What we don't need now is a Levitz or a Jemas operating at either end of the PC scale, either axing books because of sensitive material or going the gung ho route with Super-Team Terrorist Retribution comics.

As much as my American colleagues may disagree with me, I think the best policy is to continue the way it was. Almost everyone who has suffered bereavement has an overwhelming anger at some point during the immediate 24 hours after the death, when they can't understand why the rest of the world is continuing as normal. Leave the bellicosity and the patriotic rhetoric to the politicians and the soldiers, and concentrate on helping to heal the wounds with our usual, albeit violent, fantasy. BL

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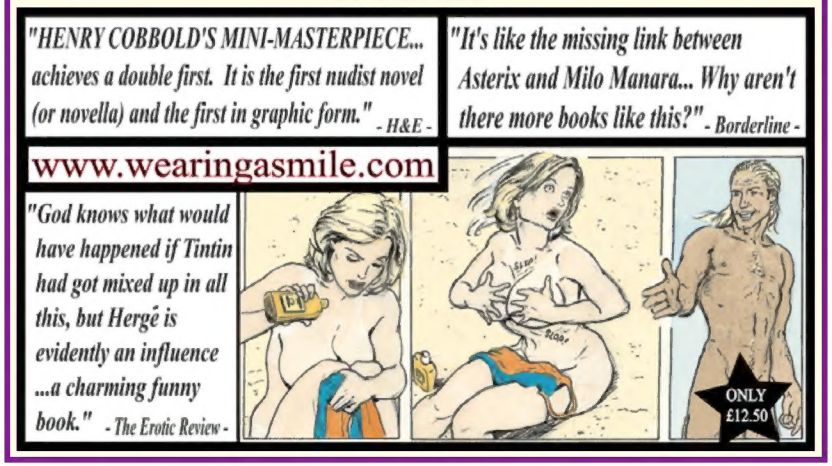
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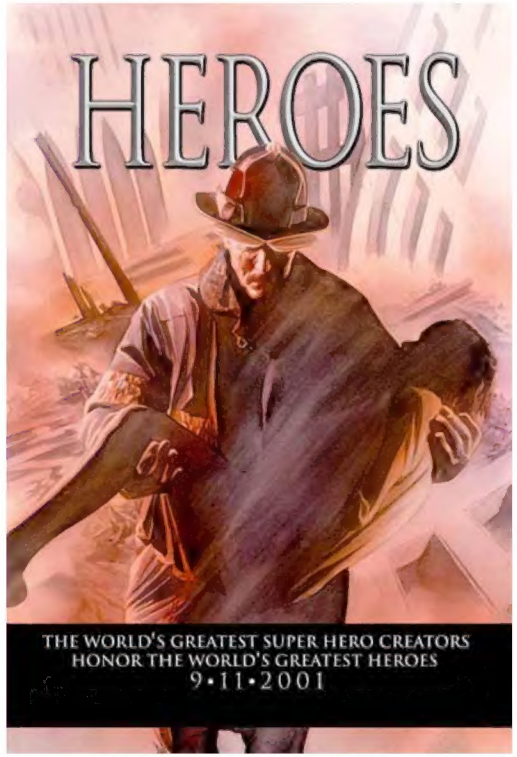
BURNING DOWN THE CURTAIN

Rich Johnston's controversial look behind the closed doors of the comics industry



THERE'S some meat in this column. But you've got a fair bit of salad to wade through first. Trust me, after the grated carrot, dried cucumber and limp lettuce, there's a prime steak just waiting for you. But first things first.

The Greens

Standard comics contracts define creators as freelance workers: they have the flexibility to work for whoever offers but receive little or no health cover, pension or any other benefits that would be offered to an employee. Standard work-for-hire contracts have been a prime reason for legal cases against publishers regarding ownership of a number of properties, such as **Superman**, **Captain America** or **Blade**.

Some companies are very strict with their contract procedure - Maureen McTigue was fired from DC for signing a creator's invoice for him so he'd be paid sooner (not to worry - she's Editor In Chief of Harris Comics now). Others are much more *laissez faire*, like Wildstorm, who recently saw star **Authority** artist Frank Quitely bail ship barely three pages into an already late book and join the (increasingly late) **New X-Men**.

Recently, however, a number of companies have increased their number of "exclusive" contracts, tying creators to a certain company for a period of time while guaranteeing them a certain level of income, often higher than if they were normal freelancers. The contract makes sure that any and all work they do is for one company. CrossGen has taken this further, actually hiring creators as full-time members of staff.

Of course, just as singers are signed exclusively to certain labels but may perform with others if the right circumstances prevail, charity projects can bring those exclusive barriers crashing down for one-off projects. Usually.

After the World Trade Centre, Pentagon and Pittsburgh tragedies, Joe Quesada announced that Marvel was producing a charity comic called **Heroes**, a poster book celebrating the real life heroes that had served during the disaster, such as policemen or firemen. And with posters taking up relatively little time for the creators involved, the contributions came flooding in.

The Meat

But there was a snag. The first I heard was that at a DC staff meeting, a senior figure (alleged to be VP Marketing, Bob Wayne, and Joe Quesada's nemesis) apparently said that Marvel had been calling up freelancers under exclusive contract to DC and telling them that DC will let them out of their contract for this one project. Which, apparently, DC would be more than happy to do if Marvel would do the same with their exclusive freelancers for a similar project that DC is arranging. But, according to this report, Marvel wouldn't. And so DC said they wouldn't either.

Look, you're going to see a lot of these "allegedly"s and "apparently"s. It's that sort of column so you'd best get used to it.

Within minutes of this story coming my way, I heard other versions. That some exclusive DC freelancers had indeed allegedly been approached by Marvel (or had in some cases approached Marvel themselves) but were apparently asked to request permission from DC - which, allegedly, was not being granted by DC publisher Paul Levitz. I've also been told that, certainly under the current regime, Marvel has not denied any exclusive creators permission to do charity work for another publisher. While not eager to comment, Joe Quesada simply told me, "If DC is planning a tribute book, I would encourage every artist at Marvel, exclusive or otherwise, to contribute if asked. If you're not asked, volunteer. I know I will."

Bob Wayne, on behalf of DC, responded, "We'd be thrilled to have Joe's work in our project, as a significant past contributor to DC's publications. If he wants to volunteer, he knows the editor's phone number." But Wayne would not comment on the allegation that DC has refused exclusive creators permission to work on Marvel's charity project.

It all seems a game of spin and counter spin. Further digging revealed that the alleged speech by Bob Wayne was based on an apparent attempt by Marvel editor Jenny Lee to recruit Phil Jimenez, exclusively contracted to DC, for **Heroes**. One version states that Jenny asked Phil to ask permission, another says that Jenny told

Phil that he'd been given permission to contribute when he hadn't. Phil Jimenez told me only that "there seems to have been some miscommunication between me and the editors at Marvel; and I think that this sort of gossip – as well as the attacks launched by Marvel – is bad for both companies and for the industry in general."

Nevertheless, the fact that DC would not match Joe Quesada's statement, or refute the allegation that they internally spun a situation to deprive a charity comic of desired creators, is disturbing.

The Dessert

One of Quesada's many surprise signings was Alan Moore, writing a text piece for **Heroes**. But why was Alan happy to contribute to Marvel's benefit project… but not DC's? Both companies have caused Moore upset in the past and he's sworn off working for either of them before (firewall and ABC excepted). It's down, it turns out, to a matter of content.

Alan Moore told DC that he wasn't too happy in contributing to a charity project based around superheroes for this. He personally considers that it's not very appropriate or relevant. Which is why, presumably, he's happier to work on the Marvel project.

But doesn't the Marvel project also have superheroes in it? I asked Joe Quesada about this seeming contradiction. He told me, "Some guys did superheroes although I was encouraging them against it." And we've seen a number of those online: Mike Deodato's Captain America, Frank Miller's Cap, Keown's Hulk…

One rumour doing the rounds was that Joe Quesada had purposely lied to Alan Moore to get a contribution from him, but both men deny this version. Quesada said, "I told him that I was hoping it would be superhero free... but then Frank, Mike and a few others handed in some superhero-related pieces and I thought they were wonderful and personal. I also needed as many marquee names as possible! I didn't say "NO HEROES" – I was just discouraging it.".

Moore told me he understood perfectly what was required when putting a charity book like this together, and while he'd prefer the book to be without superheroes, that is just his personal feeling.

Clearing the Table

In the end, Marvel managed to get a high quality poster book out in record time and raise vast sums as soon as possible – DC's project is only due in January. But with Marvel and DC using many opportunities to take potshots at each other and despite the call for Americans to get on with their lives as normal, one wonders if this was an appropriate venue for "business as usual".

[SUPERHERO] COMICS YOUR GIRLFRIEND MIGHT READ

***Jenni Cole** looks at comics you normally wouldn't imagine even trying to get your girlfriend to read*

MUCH publicity surrounded the recent fan campaign to save Marvel's **Spider-Girl** title from cancellation. Amid it all, the most interesting fact was that a huge factor in the decision to continue this low-selling but not actually unprofitable title was its unusually high proportion of female readers. If Marvel cancelled this (apparently accidentally) girl-friendly title, would the female readers go elsewhere, or would they go altogether? It was a risk Marvel wasn't prepared to take; the book escaped cancellation, and the Diamond catalogue *Previews* began soliciting future issues alongside the pronouncement "Comics Your Girlfriend Will Read!".

At last! *Finally*, someone has noticed that comics that appeal to girls are … actually not that different from those that appeal to boys. You see, female comics readers are - I promise you - not really *that* different from any other comics reader, and comics "for girls" don't have to be small press feminist tracts about how we should all embrace our periods as divine wimmin-pain and put a stop to the evils of men *now*. If you're going out with a fairly normal, relatively well-adjusted girl, the last thing she's going to want is you shoving Julie Doucet's down-below bits under her nose.

Unless you met her at the indie/small press rack in a comic shop, in which case she knows about them anyway and doesn't need directions from you. The truth is, just as most male Anglophone comics readers read mainstream comics because that's what … um… makes them mainstream, that's what most female comics fans read too. So why does it seem to have taken Marvel by surprise that a spinoff from one of its most popular titles, which stars a strong female protagonist, has proved to be such a hit with the girls?

I've been a comics reader for more than two decades, brought up on four-colour heroes and heroines because my mother was a comics fan before me and the **Fantastic Four**, **Daredevil** and the **Justice League** were always there. And I loved them. Loved the fantastical adventures, the bonkers situations, the incredible powers and weird costumes … in short, probably the same thing that every little boy reading them loved about them too. Which is why it annoys me so much that, 90% of the time, if you see a column or article about comics and girls, it's virtually guaranteed to be directing them towards faux-female "insight" along the lines of **Strangers in Paradise**. Sorry, boys - when girls lock themselves in their bedrooms with girl pals, the

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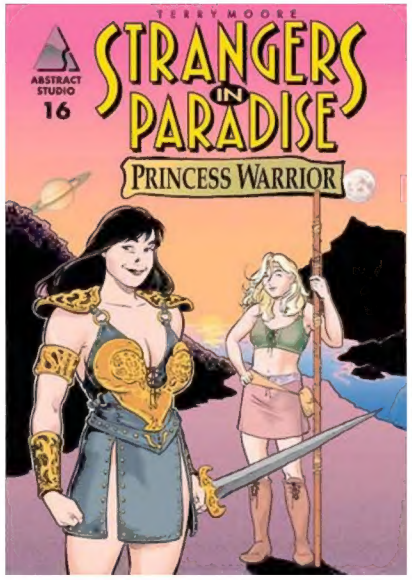
last thing they do is start wandering around in their underwear contemplating "should-I shouldn't-I" lesbian relationships. And their best friends are very rarely nerdy boys. This is the fantasy of boys who don't talk to girls, delivered to you by – ooh, look at the credits – a boy who probably doesn't talk to girls either.

Meanwhile, during a recent discussion on who our favourite comics characters might be, I was told "I don't know why you like the Black Widow (fourth on my list behind Captain Marvel Jr, Crystal and Nick Fury, for anyone who cares) so much - she's not aimed at you, you know." Not aimed at me? Really? There's some reason I shouldn't enjoy reading about the adventures of a kick-ass superspy with the figure to carry off the coolest skin-tight black leather jumpsuit in history and a little black book that could be published under the title *Most Shaggable Men in the Marvel Universe*? She does what she wants, where she wants, when she wants, always comes out on top and is, surely, the epitome of what every little girl wants to grow up to be. Honestly, boys, you think you want to grow up to be Iron Man but we want to grow up to be introspective indie losers? Get real - we want to suspend our disbelief too.



Once you accept this, you might begin to notice something. While the "adventures" of Katchoo and whatever her equally skimpily clad pal's name is; Enid Coleslaw and the pretty one who's there to keep you interested; and even Maggie and Hopey (although they get special dispensation, of course - **Love and Rockets** is beyond reproach even when it does fit the stereotype) are penned by men, the women in comics are writing **Black Widow**, **Birds of Prey**, **Rogue** and **Magdelena**. Being dumpy, moping about the state of the world and wearing a short skirt with Doc Martens - or taking on crime, getting into fights and shagging Nightwing or Daredevil? Heck, I don't need Devin Grayson to tell me which of those options I'd prefer, and if you do, you're going to have more trouble getting your girlfriend to read comics than you realise. Similarly, I doubt many 16-year-old boys would think twice before recommending the cheap thrill of **Witchblade** to their male classmates, but how many of them would think to hand an issue of **Captain America** to the girls for exactly the same reason? Six foot two of human perfection, with a face modelled on a 25-year-old Robert Redford and just enough vulnerability to need a really big hug now and again. Not only that, but his regular squeeze is the director of a world-wide secret agent network that makes James Bond look like an accountant. Sharon Carter doesn't need to be rescued from the clutches of evil every issue - she's probably already dispatched them while Cap is still looking for the doorway into their secret hideout. And what about the Wasp, a woman who leads the Avengers into battle and still finds time to be a world famous fashion designer? There's a heroine I can aspire to.

Journalists aren't necessarily wrong when they focus on comics for girls being those that are more oriented towards soap opera and characterization than fist fights and explosions, but where they lose the plot is when they assume that for soap opera and characterization to appeal to women, it has to be weaned away from the fantastical elements that make it interesting. Certainly, among the other female comics fans I know (and you may be surprised to find that there are quite a few), writers such as the late Mark Gruenwald, Tom DeFalco, Steve Englehart, Chris Claremont and Mark Waid, who focus on character development, are more popular than those who gloss over it. Books such as **Birds of Prey**, the various X-Men titles, **Titans** and **The Authority** with strong, kick-ass (but not half-naked) women characters fare well, as do those, such as **Daredevil**, **Captain America** and **Green Lantern**, in which the men have brains to match their equally welcomed brawn and strong women in the supporting cast. **Wonder Woman** is another obvious chick-friendly book, but in my experience it's more popular with gay men than girls. Either way, think of it in the simplest terms - if you wish you were Captain America and covet a girlfriend like Sharon Carter, chances are your girlfriend will be just as up for wishing she was Sharon Carter with a boyfriend like Captain America. If you and your girlfriend both like *Buffy*, *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*, give her the comics you like, too. If you liked *Terminator 2* and *The Matrix*, or novels by Dean Koontz and John Grisham, you wouldn't buy her straight-to-video arthouse movies and obscure books published by Virago, so why steer her away from the mainstream comics you like?

What mainstream US comics do best is what no other media can do – sustained, fantasy adventure, delivered regularly over a long period of time that enables characters to develop, change, leave, come back, do anything the writer's imagination can conjure and allow you to become part of a comics community while you're doing it. Which is why lazy, ignorant journalism such as Polly Vernon's piece in the August 25 *Guardian Guide* annoyed me so much. Polly's "discovered" that despite being a comic, **Ghost World** is cool, but beware, girls – go down to Forbidden Planet and you'll find that all comics fans are either complete dweebs or 45-year-old men who wank off to the Buffy merchandising in the window, while the staff are more interested in getting on with their jobs than in answering your inane questions. Please. Polly didn't get chatted up the whole time she was in there, poor lamb, instead she got treated just the same way as she would have if she'd walked into her local high street V-Shop acting like a hipper-than-thou princess asking for Pixies albums. Yet this somehow proves that all comic shops are intimidating and unpleasant places for all women - a myth perpetuated by the same people who believe that wimmin-only colleges and men-only bars at cricket clubs are still a good idea in the 21st century. In other words, people who spend far too much time trying to look for barriers between the sexes that are much higher than they really are, and who would much prefer to add a few more bricks to the top of the walls than knock them down. The real world is not like this - not even comics fandom is like this. Honest. If you've got a new girlfriend and you want to introduce her to comics, there's a very simple formula for choosing which ones she'll like: show her the ones *you* like. After all, is it so strange to suppose that you might have something in common? BL

THE BLANK PAGE

Chev talks about... mature readers and puerile writers

AN INTERESTING antithesis occurred in the world last month.

While everyone watched as the events of September 11th unfolded live on television, we all learned something valuable about the true heroes among us. Without super-strength or heat-vision or invulnerability, people exhibited heroism and nobility in the face of certain and unknowable danger. Some of them saved lives, some of them lost their lives, and some of them – far more of them than is right – did both.

Many people likened the images to something out of a comic book, but it was widescreen tragedy without the intervention of the superhero. In times like these, escapism is a blessing; being able to retreat into a movie, a book, or a comic, even for a little while, gives many of us a respite that helps to keep us sane. It doesn't change the world, but it makes it fade for a little while.

*cover to **Alias** #5*

How unfortunate and misguided then that in the same month that ordinary people became heroes, some of our comic book heroes became ordinary people.

In **Alias**, the first offering from Marvel's Max Comics imprint, we saw self-loathing, hard-drinking protagonist Jessica Jones allow Luke Cage to have anal intercourse with her, with callous disregard for his feelings after the fact. It could have been worse – she might have seduced Iron Fist. However, Jessica Jones is a new character and if we don't currently feel much empathy for her then that's something writer Brian Michael Bendis is going to have to work on; but the way in which this besmirches Luke Cage – known to regular Marvel readers as Power Man – is ill considered.

Yet **Alias** pales in comparison to the following week's offering of **Fury**, a contemporary tale written by Garth Ennis, featuring Cold Warrior Nick Fury lost in a world that no longer needs him. Ennis (no fan of superheroes to begin with) proceeded to ride roughshod over one of Marvel's

*cover to **Fury** #5*

oldest and best-loved characters, with little regard for the history or ideals of the character. In just this first issue, he has him committing unsanctioned mass-murder; contemplating the execution of his ward Wendel, not because he is - as Fury puts it - "a four-eyed retard", but simply because he is an embarrassment; calling a waitress a "fucking cunt" (although he's gentleman – or coward – enough not to say it to her face); and finally wishing for "another war".

If it is hard to reconcile the '70s Luke Cage with the one portrayed in **Alias**, then it is even harder to imagine the slick super-spy of Jim Steranko's **Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.** being reduced to the cynical murderer that Ennis has him become. These characters have been hauled into the 21st Century so abruptly that many of the qualities that made them so admirable to begin with have been lost in the transition, and all we're left with is fallen heroes and a flurry of misconceived, publicity-seeking shock tactics that will be sure to gain attention, but may be hard-pressed to keep it.

These Max Comics are the result of an editorial laxity that is disrespectful of Marvel's characters and, to a large extent, their readership. That the editors of both these titles are late of DC's Vertigo would indicate their familiarity with mature themes and language; however the concepts and boundaries contained within superhero comics (even those intended for mature readers) are a far cry from what is acceptable in the insular world of the Vertigo comic.

We should applaud Marvel for dropping the Comics' Code from its titles – when you can't even use the word 'suck' in a comic aimed at teenagers and older then something obviously needs to be done. Comics such as the Ultimate line have joined Marvel Knights in leaving the restrictions of the Code behind and forging ahead with a mature version of superhero comics as opposed to an adult one. Grant Morrison has introduced emphatic sexual tension into **New X-Men** in a world filled with greater genetic prejudice and violence, and his portrayal of the **Fantastic Four** is that of an overtly dysfunctional family, riddled with jealousy, rivalry and passion. Bendis's cast of Spider-Man characters talk and act more like real people than ever before, cementing their believability in an otherwise unreal universe. To have these characters curse and have sex in such explicit terms only serves to remove them from their world and ground them in ours, which is anathema to the readers of superhero comics.

The comics of the Max imprint have taken a step in the right direction, but it is a step too far. The difference between a mature comic and an adult one is clearly discernable, and should be obvious to anyone reading comics, much less editing and writing them. It is a matter of context and responsibility, which are qualities these comics lack.

The editors and writers of Max Comics have an excellent opportunity before them: to take their Marvel Knights' foundations and build on them in order to reach that elusive proportion of the readership that currently reads only the Vertigo and independent comics. They may even attract the attention of people who currently don't read comics at all.

Most of the **Spider-Man**, **X-Men** and Marvel Knights titles are already well-written mature comics, featuring characters living a recognisably human existence in a world that is similar to, and yet not, our own. Superheroes should be an inspiration, living in a world that is better than ours through their influence. Let's not drag superheroes down to our level any more than is necessary. Let them continue to inspire us, so that we may work to be more like them, without corrupting their ideals to make them more like us.

As we have seen recently, we don't live in the same world as superheroes; we live in the world of ordinary heroes. That, in the end, should be enough. BL

LEARNING CURVES

Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate

Toon In

FOR DECADES now we've grown up watching the animated adventures of many favourite comicbook and comic strip characters. It's a natural transfer, since each is just like the other, but one comes without word balloons. So it seemed equally natural to animate superheroes.

In 1967 when Spider-Man first caught "thieves just like flies" on the small screen, no one thought that they would need to make a comicbook spinoff of the cartoon that spun off from the comicbook. Even twenty years later when he fought together with Iceman & Firestar, Spider-Man was lucky to have the one issue adapting their first televised adventure.

As cartoons became glorified adverts for the latest toys, more and more merchandise was being created, and now we're left with no end of cheap eighties comics based on these churned out cartoon heroes, most of which can be picked up and fondly laughed at while thumbing through the bargain bins. There are, however, a select few that are harder to find. Due to reader and retail demand (and perhaps the notable popularity of the new Image comic) Marvel has announced that they will reprint their old **G I Joe** collection in a series of new trade paperbacks, along with a collection of their original **Transformers** line.

Meanwhile both cartoons and their accompanying comics have been evolving. Both have started to progress beyond the stereotypical heavy black outlines with rainbow colours and goofy scripts. Arguably, a large part of the credit for this growth in style can be given to the emergence of **Batman: The Animated Series.**

Stylistically smooth, driven, and hidden in shadows; the new Gotham City reflected the mood of the show's eponymous hero. Diverging from traditional character designs, animator Bruce Timm created bodies that did not need to be anatomically correct. Sleek, curvaceous icons melted into the luscious "dark deco" cityscape. For kids and adults alike, it changed the rules set out by the Broadcast Standards & Practices. Before cartoon characters couldn't even form a fist to throw a punch, but now Batman was roughing up gun-wielding thugs.

With such a huge success on their hands, it was natural for DC to transform this hit series into a hit title. Together, Ty Templeton, Rick Burchett & Mike Parobeck eased the cartoon's style onto the printed page. The two were closely linked; as the cartoon evolved to include new characters, so did the comics with titles like **Batman Adventures**, **Batman & Robin Adventures**, **Batman: Gotham Adventures**, and a variety of spin-off adventures. Most are easy to find, but in some cases you'll part ways with five to ten dollars for the occasional issue.

Then came **Mad Love**, the origin of the most popular character created for the cartoon series, Harley Quinn. Just as Firestar was created especially as a balance against Iceman's powers in **Spider-Man & His Amazing Friends**, Harley was created to be the love interest and occasional grounding influence on the normally over-the-top Joker. She grew to be such a fan favourite that she was in more demand than either her honey or The Batman himself! Not only was the one-shot based around her a sell out, but it won an Eisner Award. You're better off picking up the later prestige format version as it's easier and cheaper than hunting down the first, standard format printing.

Another influence on both media is the rise in popularity of Japanese culture and animation in the West. The smooth colours and movement in the heat of the action in Eastern feature films could put even Disney to shame. The same fluidity, style and earth-toned colour schemes have found their way into US comics with titles like **Neon Cyber**, **Dark Minds**, and **Warlands**. Pat Lee's Dreamwave Productions has produced a handful of top quality, highly desirable and strangely affordable titles.

Lee's success has paved the way for other studios with the same animated influences. UDON and Studio XD have previously worked on Image's small hit **Last Shot**, and they are now entering even further into the crossover world of animation and comic books, providing the art for Marvel's upcoming **X-Men: Evolution** comic book. For those uncertain of a new take on the X-Men outside of continuity, just remember how successful **Ultimate X-Men** is. That was intended to bring in new younger readers while appealing to existing buyers. **Evolution** looks set to be just what the Ultimates were meant to be, along with better art.

Unfortunately, in the grand scheme of things, the shelf life of animation-based comics isn't very long. Each Batman adaptation has ended to make way for the next. Sadly, **Batman Beyond** has been cancelled after a meagre two years, although **Batman: Gotham Adventures** still has a strong following and will reach issue #45 this December. Despite having a huge televisual audience and owing many of its influences to comics, **The Powerpuff Girls** comic book doesn't sell well in the West, and the previous **Animated X-Men** adaptation slumped away into obscurity. Let's hope that the fresh concept, stylish art, and pre-existing audience will keep this next adaptation alive.

BL

ISSUES

Carol Close has many of them

ARNOLD Schwarzenegger's film *Collateral Damage* is postponed indefinitely, while a scene featuring the World Trade Centre is edited out of 2002's *Spider-Man* movie. Rage Against The Machine are banned from US radio, Primal Scream drop the song *Bomb the Pentagon* from their live set, and The Strokes leave the less than complimentary *New York City Cops* off the American release of their debut album. An episode of the US teen sitcom *That 70s Show* has the word "explosion" bleeped from its soundtrack, while Bill Maher, the host of US TV discussion show *Politically Incorrect* is forced to make an unconditional apology for "off-message" comments made in the first show after the September 11 attacks. Elsewhere, radical filmmaker/polemicist Michael Moore reckons HarperCollins are set to pulp his latest book, entitled *Stupid White Men and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation*.

It seems creative people of every stripe, whether in Britain or the United States, have been running scared since the attacks on the World Trade Centre/Pentagon, applying a "safety first" ethic to make their songs, words and pictures guaranteed to offend no one, almost obsessive in their desire to avoid anything deemed unsupportive, unsympathetic or, heaven forbid, controversial. Now, there's nothing wrong with exercising sensitivity in light of such an outrage, but some of these decisions have been hypocritical and cowardly. Nowhere is this more evident than in the comicbook industry.

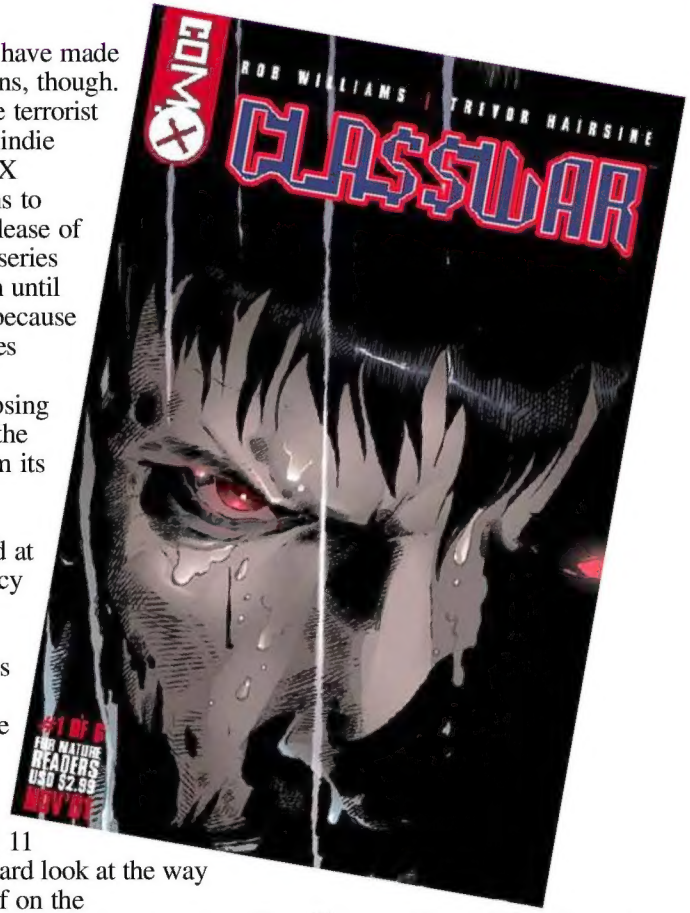
Let's take the decision to postpone and alter the final three issues of **The Authority** - as well as cancelling the Brian Hitch "widescreen" one-shot and the Azzarello/Dillon mature readers ongoing series - as a case in point. Why was it perfectly acceptable for DC/Wildstorm to publish a book as violent and amoral as **The Authority** before September 11, but not after it? Terrorism, apocalypse, death and destruction have haunted Rwanda, Chechnya, Palestine, Israel, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq for years, resulting in not thousands but *millions* of deaths. But it's only now, after a terrorist atrocity on US soil, that those involved with the title have decided that enough is enough.

This is astonishingly disingenuous behaviour when you consider that the entire *raison d'être* of this grubby, glib little comic is to revel in the world's worst excesses, to glory in big scale acts of vengeance and make gory black comedy out of man's inhumanity to man. So, come on boys, what has happened to your ironic smirks and knowing winks? Why is it that the tragedy in the States has moved you to pull the plug on **The Authority** but the enormous human misery and suffering that existed *before* the World Trade Centre/Pentagon catastrophes was nothing more than source material to inspire the title's next big double-page splash or ultra-violent set-piece?

Indeed, far from making DC/Wildstorm look caring, sorrowful or respectful, the decision to ditch **The Authority** actually suggests a blinkered and somewhat callous worldview. In other words, they're a company perfectly happy to make money from the misery of others, as long as those others belong to some far off foreign land and not their own.

* * *

It isn't just the big comic book companies that have made baffling decisions, though. Shortly after the terrorist attacks, British indie publisher Com.X announced plans to postpone the release of its **Cla$$ War** series from this month until next year. Not because it featured planes exploding or buildings collapsing but because of the explicit criticism its "corporate superheroes" premise levelled at US foreign policy and American multinationals. Now, this strikes me as a bit strange, because the one thing the USA *really* needs to do post-September 11 is take a long, hard look at the way it conducts itself on the international stage. Therefore, any work, creative or factual, which offers insight, opinion or criticism, is vital - especially when you consider the way in which certain elements of the American and British media, and those countries' respective political establishments, have tried to limit the debate to exclude dissenters such as Bill Maher and Michael Moore.



Is it any wonder that comics are considered such lowbrow fare when even the few prepared to tackle "difficult" subject matter run for cover at the thought that they might take some flak for expressing an opinion counter to that of the current status quo? Com.X, a small publisher keen to get a foothold in the USA, should be commended for deciding to publish a work directly critical of that country in the first place, but their decision to postpone smacks of cowardice and woolly thinking. With massive air strikes recently launched against Afghanistan resulting in many civilian casualties, I'd suggest there is no more appropriate time to publish a series dissecting US foreign policy than now. Indeed, with the "War on Terror" set to drag on well into 2002 and beyond, one wonders when Com.X *will* deem it appropriate to publish this series, if ever. BL

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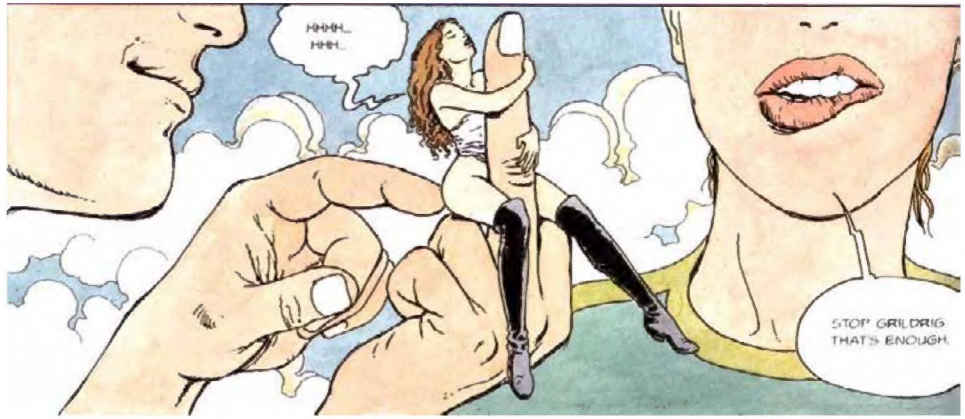
CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Kevin Schomburg's European odyssey for quality continues

Gullivera

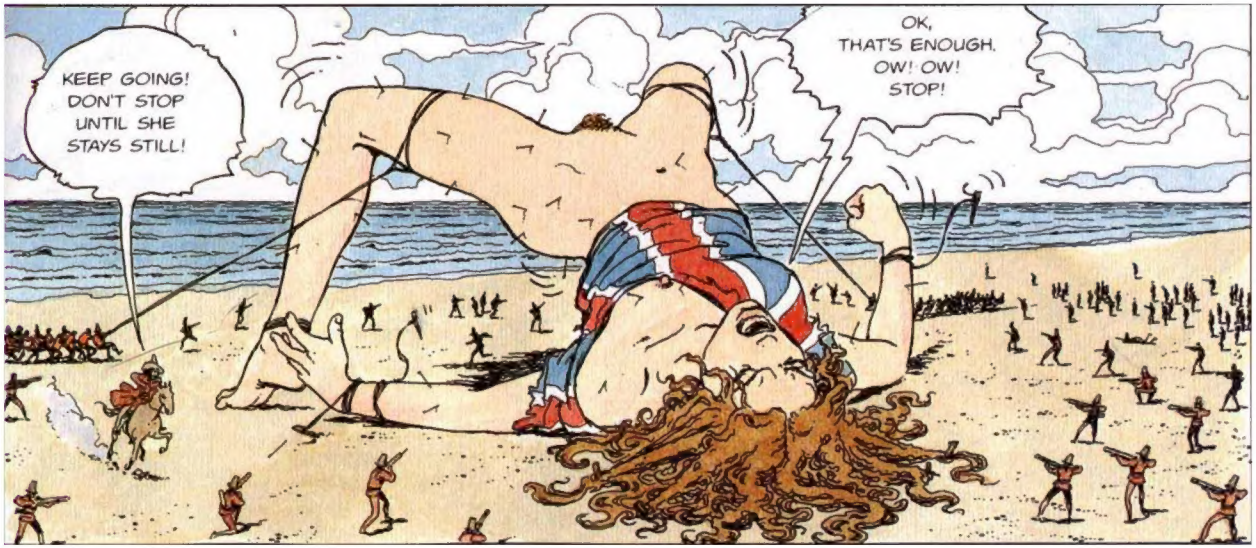
THE 18th century Irish author Jonathan Swift left his mark on literary history with a number of poems and satirical, expressive pieces, at least one of which was not received too well by critics at the time. His *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People From Being a Burden to Their Parents Or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick* produced an outcry, as it proposed to sell Irish children to be slaughtered and eaten, all for the sake of alleviating famine and raising Ireland's national income. An earlier piece by Swift, however, the still very popular *Travels tnto Several Remote Nations of the World* in which Lemuel Gulliver describes his adventures overseas, received lasting critical acclaim. Known to the world at large as **Gulliver's Travels** and often published in abridged versions as children's literature, this satirical tale underlines Swift's scepticism towards utopian ideals and his criticisms of "normality" by dehumanizing Gulliver's perception of the world - until in the end, upon his return to England, he suffers from severe misanthropic delusion.

In Milo Manara's **Gullivera** the heroine is at least as gullible as her famous ancestor but bestowed with stunning looks. During a day at the beach she discovers an abandoned ship which takes her to the realm of Lilliput; there she is bound and taken as a prisoner to the King, who uses her as an arch for a military parade. On her further travels with the ship Gullivera comes to the land of Brobdingnag, home of the giants; she encounters the Houyhnhnms, sentient talking horses; and finally she arrives at Laputa (*sic*!) the flying island of the scholars. Whereas in **Gulliver's Travels** the narrator has to prove his multifarious skills to all the peoples he encounters, Gullivera impresses with her beauty and her unsullied sexuality and that is consequently what everybody seems interested in – this is a Manara comic, after all! The artist amazes with his lavish use of body posture, which offers provocative views of Gullivera's nakedness. Just as Swift's Gulliver gradually loses his rationality, so Manara's Gullivera drops her clothes and her restraint. But where Gulliver's encounters lead to self-doubt and contempt for humanity, Gullivera just shrugs it off with an enjoyable and unequalled bitchiness.



Manara picks up on many references from the original. For instance, Swift had his hero put out a fire in Lilliput with his urine; it does not take much pondering to imagine what the Italian master of the erotic comic creates from that. When Gullivera meets the Houyhnhnms they want to mate with her, but she is scared and hurries off – an amusing reversal, since in **Gulliver's Travels** the hero envies the horses for their perfect state of being and is thrown out of their country. However, the best reflection must be Gullivera's visit to the flying island of Laputa, the home of a people who live for the sciences. On Manara's Laputa the women desperately try to wake their men - who, tired from stargazing at night, sleep through the whole day - by spanking each other…

Overall, **Gullivera** does not reach for the satirical depth or complexity which Swift's original holds (what a surprise), but Manara has produced an astonishingly sexy album in which he combines all those themes which he holds dear: a beautiful protagonist, some bondage, some spanking, a lot of nude posing and quite a few faithful yet variant annotations of his source material (and then there is that urine scene…). All this is pulled off in his familiar manner, but the unusual, pastoral surroundings offer a nice panoramic change.



Gullivera *is a 72 page album by Milo Manara, published by Humano S.A. English translation published by Nantier Beall Minoustchine (NBM) Publishing in the USA.* ***Gulliver's Travels*** *can be read online at a well designed site at http://www.jaffebros.com/lee/gulliver/*

Pictures: *Left: Gullivera is taken prisoner by the Lilliputians above: The Giants have their fun with Gullivera*

BL

MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry

JIM came to one of the meetings a month or so ago. You might remember Jim, and you should, though I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't. It's been a while since he was, you know, *around*, as such. Well, Jim appeared, framed in the doorway with this *really* bright light behind him, and wouldn't you know it? We'd lost him. For good, I mean. We've thought we'd lost him before, more than once, but somehow he always made good.

This time we knew he'd gone. He was raving and shouting and generally acting like some guy who'd been living naked in a hole for ten years and after a few minutes a lot of us got kind of embarrassed and started to ignore him. It was for his own good.

But then something started to change. You know how you can be in the middle of something and suddenly you look at what you're doing and you realize that it's all wrong? Or how you can listen to somebody who's, say, making a speech or, like Jim, just ranting, and they say something and a little switch flips over inside your head and you think "yeah, you're on to something" but then the switch flips back, but only halfway? So you're thinking "yeah, you're right, but you're *not right enough*."

Jim as the head of a terrorist ridding world conglomerate

Jim was on about the alien rays that had made it through his tin-foil hat and sent him a message From Beyond The Stars, and as luck would have it that message was that Comics Have Become Evil. Now, I'm not about to argue with Jim on this, because in the most part I agree with him. If anything, I'd say that Comics Became Evil a long time ago, probably back when it became necessary to have Events rather than Stories.

Jim says that there's this new superhero comic just been announced, where the main character has superpowers and a costume and all that stuff that's just so necessary in a comic, but the kicker is - and this is what makes the book Evil - that she's a prostitute!

I think that's fantastic. Yes, really. The only thing wrong with it is that the character's not male. A superhero selling his arse down the 'Dilly between fight scenes, that'd do for me. Making the character female is just pandering to the sexually-deprived. Besides, everybody knows that superheroines don't sell.

Ahhh, Jim. Poor Jim, whose own work featured purple-skinned African-Americans, giving new meaning to the phrase "people of colour". Didn't see you declaiming the evil of that, did we? Jim has a point though. But to make that point Jim's had to do something naughty and make assumptions. After all, for all we know the book will be a sensitively-executed portrayal of a woman forced by circumstance to use and degrade her only asset - her body - in order to make a living. It may be a savagely satirical socio-political piece,

Jim as Professor Denzil Dexter of the University of California

assaulting the ingrained notion that our heroes should do what they do for little or no reward; the fantasy costumed hero doing what a number of real-life "heroes" - nurses, teachers, etc.- have to do simply to survive. It may be making the point that some make about women who work in pornography: that while the exploitation of women may be a bad thing, more of the exploited are becoming the exploiters, and that to *not* exploit one's body is now as unforgivable as the reverse once was. But let's be honest; that's not very likely, is it?

So let's join Jim in the Room Of Completed Assumptions, in which we can happily say the following...

It's not the fact that the character is a superhero whore which makes this book Evil, if Evil it be. The Evil is that somebody who was once one of the modern medium's better writers has now reached a point in his career where he's able and willing to foist this kind of cack off onto the public.

The Greater Evil is that no editor has had the balls to say "No! That's Enough!" to the writer, either with this project or with some of the other cack he's been aiming at the public. More than one of the fella's recent projects have had the air of Old Shite about them; why has no editor just told him so? Why hasn't anybody said "You Can Do Better?" Has he reached some strange Michael Jackson-esque stage in his career where nobody will turn round and tell him the equivalent of "*You Rock My World* Is Crap?"

And The Greatest Evil is that this book will - take my word for this one - have sufficient purchasers to make it viable and successful.

And you know whose fault that is. Don't you? BL

WORLD COMICS

Paul Gravett's journey round the world of comics

A Child's Voice

ONE of the few positive aftereffects of the September 11th terrorist attacks, as evidenced by the reported flood of Amazon orders for books on the subject, has been a heightened curiosity about Islam and Islamic cultures. It seems people in the West want to try and understand more about what Islam means, in principle and in practice.

I was in upstate New York on that Tuesday morning. Over the following days, I started wondering about Islamic and Arabic comics. I suppose I had always naively assumed that Islam's restrictions on visual imagery would inevitably prohibit any form of comics. Comics after all rely on basic graphic representation. I had also understood that there is a school of Muslim thinking which condemns any recourse to images. Some traditional Islamic experts apparently consider any visual representation whatsoever, in two or three dimensions, to be an improper imitation of the uniquely divine power to create form. That's a lot more inhibiting that any Comics Code and would seem to outlaw the entire medium.

In fact, comics have begun to flourish across the Middle East, as revealed in **Arab Comic Strips** (Indiana University Press, 1994, ISBN 0-253-20831-9), a fascinating study of the politics of an emerging mass culture by husband and wife team Allen Douglas and Fedwa Malti-Douglas. They have spent many years investigating the recent strip output of the Arab world, from official hagiographic novels that celebrate national leaders like Nasser and Saddam Hussein as idealized heroes, to the subtly subversive political strips of Egyptian editorial cartoonist Ahmad Hijâzî. Hijâzî also illustrates a children's comic character for the popular pan-Arab magazine **Mâjid**.

Zakiyya is a brainy little girl in glasses who enlightens her pals about Arab history and politics. She doesn't have quite the rebel "grrrl power" of anarchist Beryl the Peril or feminist Little Lulu, though! Also examined is the controversial attempt by the Tunisian Youssef Seddik with French illustrators to adapt the Koran into comics. This was attacked by Islamic authorities, although Seddik had made concessions by ensuring than none of the prophets were portrayed physically. So, for example, Abraham was shown only as a glowing ball of light.

As the only reference work in English I've found on this subject, **Arab Comic Strips** offers many invaluable insights, although the medium is obviously still quite constrained. The examples they choose, mostly conformist and often state-approved, lack much of the individualism and critical eye of the best comics from the West. But this year I discovered one remarkable example of an autobiographical comic about Iran that has become a publishing success in France.

Its author, Marjane Satrapi, was born in Iran in 1969 and as a child grew up through the fall of the Shah in 1979, and the Islamic revolution and the war with Iraq which followed. For the past six years she has been living in Paris, where she was encouraged by L'Association co-founder David B. to capture her child's eye view of how this history impacted on her and her family in a graphic novel. The result is **Persepolis** (ISBN 2-84414-058-0), a series of four autobiographical volumes to be released one a year. Published by the feisty independent group L'Association (16 rue de la Pierre Levée, 75011 Paris. E-mail: *lassocia@club-internet.fr*) in November 2000, the first volume went on to win the Coup de Coeur Alph'Art Award for best debut album at the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France this year. It has gone through four editions and some 16,000 copies, making it L'Association's third biggest selling title, maybe a further indication of the public's desire to learn about this culture.

Drawing with a spare, child-like directness in bold black and white, Marjane opens her story in 1980 on the first anniversary of the Shah being deposed, when the new regime decrees that all women must henceforth wear the traditional headdress. Marjane, just 10, has to start wearing hers at school, which is now sex-segregated and no longer bilingual and "decadent". In a telling vignette, a photograph of her mother protesting against the headdress edict is circulated to magazines worldwide, including to one in Iran, the land of the Ayatollahs, frightening her mother into tinting her hair and wearing sunglasses to disguise herself.

We then flash back to Marjane at the age of 6,

declaring herself the latest in a long line of prophets, who would cure her grandma's aching knees and abolish class divisions. We follow her growing up in Tehran in a well-to-do, politicized family during the final troubled years of the Shah, as she tries to make sense of the injustices around her, even in her own home where their maid is not allowed to eat with her at the same table. She is a bright, almost precocious kid, who devours books on politics, talks with God in her bedroom and falls asleep with her Marxism comics. Marjane explained to *Télérama Magazine*: "The most difficult thing has been to remember and transcribe as precisely as possible the feelings which drove me at the time and the situations as I felt them. Let's just say that I've written a subjective story in the most objective way I can. **Persepolis** is my vision of history. I felt a real need to express it. Now. And, for me, as I master this means of expression, I have a duty to speak about my country and its people. I don't know a single family that has not lost one of its own because of the Shah, the revolution or the Iran-Iraq war. To tell my story is also to tell theirs."

This is the story of no ordinary child, and no ordinary childhood. The reader gradually learns, just as Marjane does, about the Shah's history and his violent suppression of "revolutionaries", and about the horrors that have touched her family past. Her grandmother talks to her about her husband's imprisonment and torture; her uncle Anouche, a former rebel forced into exile in Moscow, tells her his family secrets, because they must not be lost. "I will never forget", she promises him. Anouche is arrested as a Russian spy and, granted just one ten-minute visit, he chooses to see his little niece. Before she leaves, he gives her a small swan he has sculpted out of bread as a memento. Next, we read the headline that he has been executed. The book closes with Marjane, angry at God, being called by her mother down into the basement. The Iraqi bombings are starting. The second volume, published this month, chronicles her experiences of the Iran-Iraq war till the age of 14.

This sort of intimate account of history says so much more than any factual textbook or CNN computer graphics. In *Politis* magazine, Marjane commented, "The news hides the complexity of a society. They talk about politics but never about people who are suffering its consequences and who are fighting for more freedom. Nor about the poor, who don't have the possibility of leaving." In much the same way, the political cartoon in newspapers is becoming hopelessly inadequate at dealing with the complex reality of the world, especially since September 11th. They have been fine for a single, simple, symbolic gesture, pushing the desired buttons of momentary reflection, outrage, mockery and propaganda. But that just isn't enough today, it seems to me. In terms of cartooning, the comic medium is ideally suited to tell the personal, yet universal, stories that can immerse us in the humanity and reality all but ignored or censored by the news media.

QUELLE BELLE ROBE ! QUELLE JOLIE FAILLE !!
10 MINUTES
TU SAIS QUE TU M'AS HONORÉ EN VENANT ME RENDRE VISITE ?
TU ES LA PETITE FILLE QUE J'AURAI TOUJOURS AIMÉ AVOIR.
MAIS TU VERRAS ! UN JOUR, LE PROLÉTARIAT RÉGNERA !
TIENS ! JE T'AI FAIT UN AUTRE CYGNE EN MIE DE PAIN - C'EST LE TONTON QUI M'L'A APPRIS.
ISSUE DE MA VIE !

Marjane was lucky, she was able to leave her homeland. In 1984, she was forced to, partly to escape the bombings, but also for her own safety, because, even as a teenager, she was denouncing the Islamic regime. Her five years in exile in Vienna will make up the third volume of **Persepolis**. She returned to art school in Iran in 1989, the subject of her fourth volume, where she continued to protest against injustices and absurdities, including a life-drawing class where the female model had to be covered head to toe in a tchador. France has been her home since 1994, but as an exile crafting these comics, she is continuing her life of fighting for her country's liberty.

The success of **Persepolis** in France must surely lead to translations, hopefully in English. It ranks as one of the most compelling accounts of childhood in comics since **Barefoot Gen** (Penguin Books), Keiji Nakazawa's story of surviving the atomic bombing of Japan; **The Spiral Cage** (Titan Books), Al Davison's triumphs over spina bifida; and **Daddy's Girl** (Fantagraphics Books), Debbie Drechsler's memories of her father's abuse. It also brings home the effects of war and oppression on ordinary people as powerfully as **Maus**, Art Spiegelman's family story of surviving the Holocaust, and Joe Sacco's reportage graphic novels **Palestine** and **Safe Area Gorazde**.

Thanks to works like these, year by year the medium of comics is growing ever richer. As Will Eisner put it recently, "A library is building". BL

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WHAT IS MANGA?

Kevin Hill examines more manga classics in his conclusion of a two-part look at the work of Kia Asamiya

After looking at two of Kia Asamiya's larger series last issue, what's left? Why is this a two-parter? Because Asamiya has more series available for your delectation, as Kevin Hill explains...

Space

NADESICO is the comic book tie-in to the animated series *Martian Successor Nadesico*, co-created by Asamiya with the producers of the animated series. It's set in a future where Earth is embroiled in a war with the Jupiterans, who use vast monoliths - reminiscent of those found in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* - to transport their fleet of spacecraft into our solar system, with intent to take over control of the Earth. Enter the Nadesico, a newly designed space cruiser, captained by the often less than stable Yurika Misumaru. The focus of the series is primarily on the love of Yurika's life, Akito Tenkawa. Akito is another reluctant hero, who gradually comes to terms with the fact that he must fight to save the Earth, and the people he cares for. **Nadesico** is full of homage to classic Japanese animated features, but don't let that put you off - instead, gaze at the truly phenomenal space battles, the giant robots (well, mobile suits), and the rather unusual relationships Akito forms with the various female members of the Nadesico crew. Much darker than the animated series on which it is based, **Nadesico** is a complex science fiction series that is on the same level as, and possibly even surpasses, the various *Star Trek* series in both action and characterization.

CPM Manga has recently finished publishing the series in monthly issues, with two collections currently available and a third on the way.

Steam

Currently being serialized in Viz Communications' **Animerica Extra** is **Steam Detectives**, by far the most accessible of Asamiya's series. Gone are the twisting plot lines, this series is just for fun. And it is a lot of fun. Set in a world where steam power still rules, the story follows the investigations of Narutaki, a boy detective. Joining Narutaki are Ling Ling, a beautiful nurse, Goriki, a megamaton (a very large steam powered robot), and Kawakubo, Narutaki's butler and aide (shades of Batman). Standing against him are a variety of villains, foremost being the Phantom Knight - who wears a costume not dissimilar to Batman's and may or not be responsible for the deaths of Narutaki's parents (yet another Batman homage). Other villains include the slightly unbalanced Dr. Guilty - whose Shadowbolt megamatons are pitted against Goriki on more than one occasion - and the criminal mastermind Le Bread, effectively Narutaki's opposite (going so far as to be accompanied by a nurse). **Steam Detectives** sees Asamiya using a simpler style, basic lines with some additional tones, usually in block colours, as opposed to the often intricate tones found in **Silent Mobius** and **Dark Angel**. Because of the style and the stories, **Steam Detectives** appears to be geared towards the younger reader, but this doesn't prevent it from being a fun read for anyone who enjoys light-hearted action adventure stories. Find one of the collections, of which there are five, or just pick up an issue of **Animerica Extra** next time you are in your local comic shop - you'll enjoy it, believe me.

Phantoms

With the release of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* came a flood of merchandise and the usual comics adaptations. Possibly unnoticed by many was the decision by Dark Horse to release the Japanese comic adaptation of the film - adapted by none other than Kia Asamiya. Unlike the previous Japanese adaptations of the Star Wars films, the translated versions of which were then being released by Dark Horse, **Phantom Menace** runs to two books. Two very slim books. While what action is there is stunningly rendered - in the style used for **Mobius Klein** - the limitation in size prevents the story from flowing as well as Asamiya's other series. Despite this, if you are a Star Wars fanatic, you could do worse than read it.

Batman

As you may have noticed Asamiya is a fan of Batman. So much so that he has actually produced a **Batman** story - subtitled *Child of Dreams* - which is hopefully soon to be released by DC in English, and he is also due to produce a back-up story for DC's **Gotham Knights**. In addition to those, Asamiya is currently working as the cover artist on **The Titans**.

You might not know who he is now, but you will soon. Try one of the above series, just to see what he is capable of. Then sit back and wait for him to conquer America.

BRAZIL, BRAZIL

Ziraldo

***Phil Hall** continues his Brazilian overview with Ziraldo – the Latin American Gerald Scarfe?*

MOST people downloading this magazine at present will be from either the UK or USA. A large percentage of those will be superhero fans. It might surprise many of you that superhero comics are not universally regarded as the be-all and end-all of the industry (and that there's more than manga, slice of life and porn comics as well). Yet in a country like Brazil many of the would-be comics creators set their sights on working for Marvel or DC, not only for the massive financial boost their pay rates amount to, but because for them superhero comics sit side by side with every other kind of comic imaginable.

In many ways, the US comics industry has always represented a great obstacle for the survival of comics' creators in developing countries. North American comics stories deal with global matters; there are very few cultural barriers for their acceptance and dissemination. In fact, most of them need only a good translation in order to be understood by other readers. To their publishers, developing countries represent potential large profits for minimal outlay - reprint inventory, have it translated by local editors and watch the profits roll in. And in the case of merchandising film spinoffs like *Batman, X-Men* or *Spider-Man*, there are very few countries that matter that can't make even more money. Yet, in many ways the US industry ignores the long-term economic potential of developing countries but, in the short term, exploits the talent.

So there are numerous artists in developing countries who try to reproduce the style and the narrative structure of US comics for their own survival: the likes of Brazilians Mike Deodato Jr. and Ed Benes, Philippino Leinil Francis Yu, or even Carlos Ezquerra, who works just as well in an American style as he does in his native Spanish one. Consequently, a lot of countries' top creative talents move their work to the United States – because, despite the lack of respect and sales there compared to in their home countries, the money to be made in the USA in just a few years *can* represent a lifetime's money in, say, a South American country; and many creators don't even have to move to the USA.

This has happened before, most notably in the 1970s when Marvel and DC employed a number of Central and South American artists. Those that were not hired, or chose not to be hired, by the US industry either produced their own superhero comics or moved into the serious world of real life comics.

This happened in Brazilian comics in the 1960s and 1970s. Older Brazilians can still remember the so-called "Brazilian super-heroes", with titles such as **Escorpião** (**Scorpion**), **Targo**, **Hur**, **Fikon**, **Super-Héros**, **Raio Negro** (**Black Ray**), etc., which borrowed the superhero concepts and set them up in Brazil. Most of the results were badly written copies of North American super heroes - The Black Ray, for example, had a powerful ring which he could use in different ways and which

he had received from a visitor from another planet who had crash landed on Earth (any similarity with DC's **Green Lantern** was most definitely intentional).

Yet, the comics that remained the most popular in Brazil were the old favourites. As much as they enjoyed the flirtation with fantasy superheroics, the general populace preferred something home grown. Talk to any Brazilian creator and two names immediately enter the conversation: Maurício de Sousa - the Walt Disney of South American comics, the archetypal businessman crossed with innovator; and Ziraldo Alves Pinto, or just Ziraldo – the cutting edge political cartoonist and comics illustrator. If de Sousa is Walt Disney, then Ziraldo is Andy Warhol...

De Sousa may be considered the most successful Brazilian artist in the field: he has spent all of his life focused exclusively on comics and is now the head of a huge team of pencillers, inkers, writers, layout artists, letterers and colorists who work on the production of several monthly and fortnightly comic books, as well as merchandising activities, advertising and cartoons. **A Turma da Mônica** (**Mônica's Gang**), Maurício's main group of characters, has been responsible for a significant change in the reading habits of Brazilian children in the last thirty years; their increase in popularity over Disney's characters has meant that Brazil is now generating some of its own profit from its own comics characters.

The greatest counterpoint to Maurício de Sousa in Brazilian comics seems to be Ziraldo.

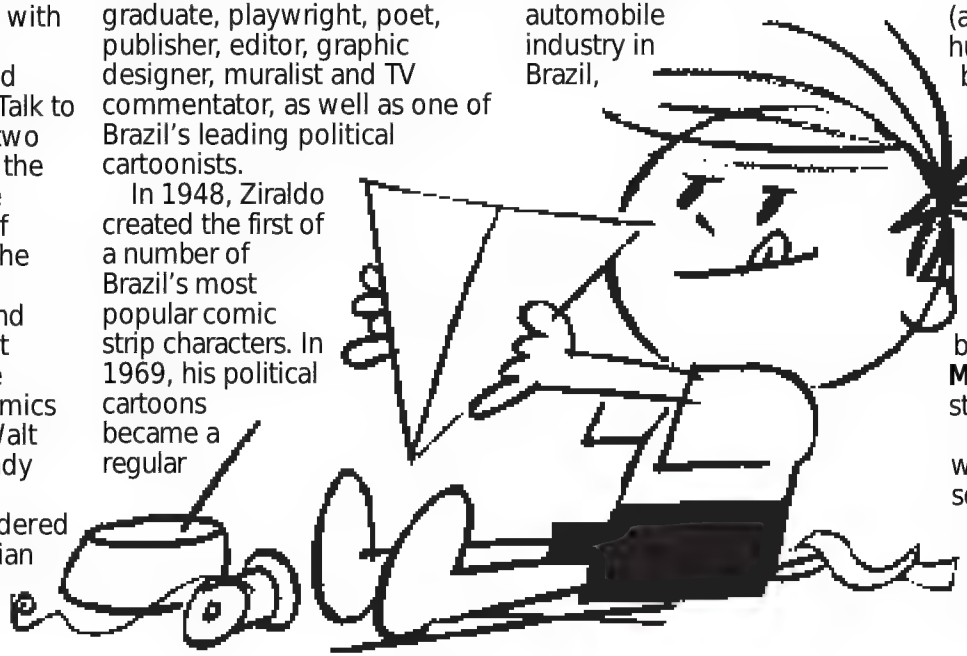
Born Ziraldo Alves Pinto in 1932, he is a modern Renaissance man: a law school graduate, playwright, poet, publisher, editor, graphic designer, muralist and TV commentator, as well as one of Brazil's leading political cartoonists.

In 1948, Ziraldo created the first of a number of Brazil's most popular comic strip characters. In 1969, his political cartoons became a regular feature of *Journal do Brazil*, Rio's major newspaper. His work has also appeared in *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Mad*, *Planet* and *Graphis*.

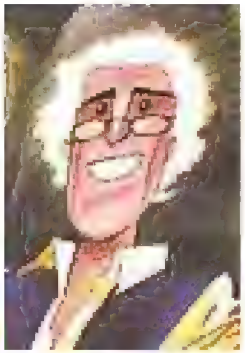
Having attained a popularity similar to that of **Mônica**'s creator, Ziraldo has refused to "embrace the universalism" the way he feels de Sousa has done with **Mônica**. In his stories there is a deep sense of specifically Brazilian characterization, an approach that he has firmly maintained.

Among Ziraldo's extensive production in comics and comic strips, the group of characters he collected together for **Pererê**, his most important series, is very typical of his desire to mirror everyday Brazilian life and society in comics.

Pererê appeared at a time of intense nationalism and coincided with the establishment of the automobile industry in Brazil, the inauguration of Brasília as official and administrative capital and the almost Harold MacMillan-like "never had it so good" euphoria generated by then President Juscelino Kubtscheck. Ziraldo assembled a group of characters that could only exist in Brazil, with characteristics peculiar to Brazilian life and its people. They included **Pedro Vieira** (an armadillo), **Moacir** (a small turtle, called "jabuti" in Brazil), **Geraldinho** (a rabbit), the **General** and later **Professor Nogueira** (an owl), **Boneca de Piche** (a very typical Afro-Brazilian child, whose name was the title of an old carnival song), **Tuiuiú** (a little indian girl who was named after a bird from the swamps of the State of Mato Grosso), **Galileu** (a jaguar), **Compadre Tonico** (a hunter) and the **Saci Pererê**, a being of folklore which Ziraldo drew as a child. The majority of these characters would have no cultural meaning outside Brazil, or perhaps other Portuguese speaking countries. Ziraldo sacrificed **Pererê**'s chances of becoming the **Liberty Meadows** of its era in order to stick to his patriotic principles.



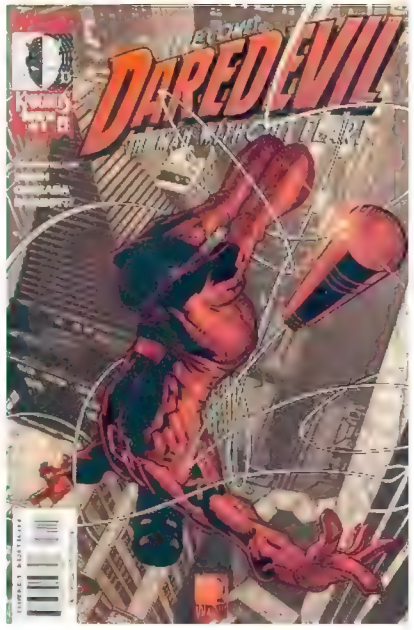
Ziraldo continues to work within Brazil, depicting life and society in his newspaper strips, comic books and through his work for web developers. His extensive credits include eight produced plays and nine children's books. Among his designs is the 1969 UNICEF Christmas poster. Awards he has received include an International Humor Oscar, Brussels 1969; the Merghenthaller Humor Award, Caracas 1974, and the Abril Journalism Award, Rio de Janerio 1981. He was co-founder and editor-in-chief of Brazil's leading humour magazine, **O Pasquim** and is co-founder of Brazil's newest satirical magazine, **Bundas**. BL



THE PRODIGAL SON OF ORIGINS

Tom Lennon takes an irreverent trip down a dark and desolate alley armed only with his wit

THE LAST few years have witnessed the rise of an all-new, all-different type of comic fan. Known as BAMs – or Born-Again Marvellites – you'll find them in any comic shop or convention, buying titles they haven't read in years and reacquainting themselves with childhood heroes they'd previously have crossed the street to avoid. They are the lapsed Marvel Comics fans who – after a decade or more in denial – are returning to their spiritual home, True Believers once again. However, whilst most have had a happy homecoming – greeted with warm embraces and champagne receptions at the front porch of the House of Ideas – others have not been so lucky. Shunned by friends, despised by other comics readers and laughed at by members of the opposite sex, they are comics' forgotten victims. They are monsters misunderstood by fankind.



Catalyst for Revolution: Kevin Smith's Daredevil

Born Again again?

The BAM phenomenon is, of course, a direct consequence of the renaissance currently sweeping the American comics industry. The mood is upbeat: nihilism has given way to optimism, comics fans are smiling again and conventions no longer resemble a scene from a particularly bleak Ingmar Bergman movie. Marvel Comics – a publisher who, for many, once seemed to epitomize the short-term, speculator-led cynicism that almost brought superhero publishing to its knees – has now become the creative cornerstone behind the biggest comics resurgence since the late 1980s. By recruiting some of the industry's hottest talent, editor-in-chief Joe Quesada has reinvigorated a once ailing line of titles, and lapsed Marvel fans want in on the action. But what made them turn their back on the company in the first place? What made them make the switch from Marvellite to Marvel-less? To answer that, we have to go back to the beginning.

Fundamarvelites?

There are two distinct types of former Marvel dissidents that make up the BAM movement. Known as "Iconoclasts'" and "Speculator Boomers", each group had different reasons for abandoning the House of Ideas, but both shared a remarkably similar background. They all started out as Fundamentalist Marvellites – or "Fundamarvellites" – during the late 1970s and early 1980s, a particularly violent period for fandom. Like most fans, they discovered comics during childhood and, like most children, were often bloody-minded and sectarian. Jedediah Moonlove, a 31 year-old British BAM from Birmingham, remembers those days vividly: "We used to get into fights after school," he recalls. "On Monday nights The Marvel Boys would beat up the DC fans. On Tuesdays, we'd get into a scrap with the 2000AD Earthlets, then beat up the DC Fans. On Wednesdays, The Marvel Boys, Earthlets, Atari Lads and Durannies would beat up the DC Fans. On Thursdays we'd all watch Top of the Pops."

Nowadays, Jedediah – a reformed Speculator Boomer – regrets being such an active participant in this mindless cycle of violence: "I see those guys at conventions sometimes… there's a pained look in their eyes that puts me in mind of a Silver Surfer panel by John Buscema. We gave those kids a hard time… there was only three of them but we were Legion, and we never let them forget the irony in *that*. I guess back then I was going through my Flash Thompson phase." Why was he so hostile towards fellow comics readers? "I was young, naïve, still coming to terms with a lot of personal grief. Jean Grey and Elektra had recently died, and I had to take it out on someone. I was only a kid. How was I to know they'd be resurrected?"

There was more to it than just cold-blooded childhood aggression, of course. What was it about Marvel in those days that would make child fight child in

ECKY, LECKY, GAFFNEY AND SPUD SAW YOU READING TEEN TITANS AFTER SCHOOL
MARY POTTS HEARD YOU SLAG-OFF MARVEL DURING WOODWORK
THOUGHT I WOULDN'T FIND OUT. DIDN'T YOU?
"WAYNE NUGENT WAS THE WORST KIND OF MARVELLITE IMAGINABLE."
'THE TYPE THAT STARTED SHAVING AT THE AGE OF SIX'
D-DIDN'T THINK YOU'D MIND. YOU USED TO LIKE GEORGE PEREZ.
AND ALL I SAID TO MARY WAS: 'WHY DO IRON MAN, CAP AND THOR BUILD THEIR OWN FURNITURE?'
'BECAUSE AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!'
UNGH!
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME, BUB!

Above, Zeppo Connery's autobiographical 'Johnny Deacy: Year 11' [1989] - a harrowing account of "Bullpen Bullying."

the name of a comics publisher? To some extent it was down to the sheer quality of their books. This was the era of Miller's **Daredevil**, Byrne's **Fantastic Four**, Simonson's **Thor** and, of course, DeFalco & Wilson's **Marvel Two-in-One featuring The Thing**. These were the industry leaders, the pioneers of super-heroic soap opera – or *supe-opera* – and their cast of emotionally disturbed, often physically impaired characters struck a chord with these young readers. Their main rival, DC, seemed old-fashioned and dull by comparison: theirs were the kind of titles your dad would read if he was still reading comics, which, of course, he wasn't. As Brad Bently, a 29 year-old recovering Iconoclast from Reno recalls: "Spidey was a loser, Iron-Man was a boozer and Hank Pym was nuts – these were things I could relate to as a kid. Superman was allergic to Kryptonite – that meant nothing to me."

By the mid-80s, however, the tide was beginning to turn. With Dick Giordano and Jenette Kahn at the helm – in many ways the Quesada and Jemas of their time – DC got their act together and started producing

...AND WE'VE BEEN MOVED TO THE TOP OF THE WAITING LIST FOR THE BEDFORD TOWERS!
IF WE WANT THAT CONDO
AH, BUT IT USUALLY TAKES MONTHS TO GET A FOOTPLACE IN MANHATTAN!

Above(s), Peter Parker [Spider-Man] contemplates purchasing a condo during a storyline cynics dubbed the "Negative Equity Saga".

better books. There was a spate of high profile creative defections, and when the likes of hard-boiled writer/artist Frank Miller was poached from Marvel, old certainties were scrambled and brand loyalties fried. "I found myself experimenting with DC books," admits Jedediah. "By '83 I was regularly reading stuff like **The New Teen Titans** and **The Legion of Super-Heroes**. Luckily by then The Marvel Boys had disbanded, otherwise I'd have probably got a good kicking."

The smell of paper

For some Marvellites, these doubts were about to explode into full-blown heresy. The release of DC's **Batman: The Dark Knight Returns** and **Watchmen** in 1986 sent shock waves through the industry. "When I first read **Dark Knight**," remembers Brad, "it was like being smacked over the eyes with a rolled up copy of *Previews*. I was amazed by its innovative storytelling, the breathtaking artwork and that nice-smelling paper. If it wasn't for Dark Knight, I'd have probably grown out of comics. Instead, I grew out of football." In less than a day these titles had become an overnight success. **Watchmen**'s blood-splattered smiley face insignia was appropriated by the Acid House movement, Alan Moore was name-checked in a Pop Will Eat Itself song while Klaus Janson was allegedly approached to play Buttons in a Bristol Old Vic production of *Cinderella*. The medium had kudos, and in the words of one fan: "If you can remember '86, then you weren't really reading comics."

For many Marvellites, this period further undermined their childhood loyalties. DC seemed to be more in tune with the new demands of comic fans. Their mainstream titles were overhauled – injected with the same kind of supe-opera angst that had previously made Marvel so popular – and they exploited the new "Mature Readers" comic demographic with titles like **The Sandman** and the subsequent Vertigo line. As a result, they were widely perceived as being more "hip" than Marvel. "I wasn't immune to this," claims Jedediah. "I was allowed to jump the queue at a fashionable discothèque [a late 80s term for "Club"] after a bouncer found a copy of **Swamp Thing** hidden in my shoe. I was later barred from the establishment after the same guy caught me reminiscing about **Secret Wars**."

Even in a climate like this, fans like Jedediah weren't prepared to abandon The House of Ideas altogether: "Deep down I was still a Marvellite, only now the emphasis was on the last syllable. I guess I had become Marvellite-Lite." Others, however, took a more radical stance. For the likes of Brad Bently, **Watchmen**, with its ruthless deconstruction of the superhero mythos, seemed like a post-mortem on the genre: "[After **Watchmen**] I couldn't look at a superhero book the same way again. How could I carry on reading **X-Men** and **The Avengers** once I'd realized that *all* superheroes were essentially giant blue naked men? When Alan Moore said he'd never go near them again – that he was more interested in the impact of fractal mathematics on out-of-town shopping malls – I could see his point. It was time for me to move on, grow up and explore *terra incomicnito*. Needless to say, when Alan Moore got bored with the shopping

For the Iconoclasts, Watchmen was regarded as the death knell of the superhero comic.

malls and abandoned this promising new genre, I abandoned Alan Moore."

This schism gave rise to the Iconoclasts – or "Short Underwear Types", as they were known at the time – and was fuelled by the increasing availability of non-superhero "indie" titles. "There was stuff like **Maus**, **Love and Rockets** and **Barefoot Gen** out there – important, spandex-free comics I thought more people should be reading," admits Brad. "I began to see Marvel and other mainstream US comics publishers as the embodiment of everything that was wrong with the medium. Reagan and Thatcher were out of office, the Cold War was over and Weird Al Yankovich had stopped making records. I guess I needed something to despise." In the years that followed, the Iconoclasts found themselves drawn increasingly towards the nether regions of the Local Comic Store, stocking up on obscure genres like Samurai Golf Manga and small press rubbish about bus drivers. They'd also taunt Marvel fans with their militant anti-superhero rhetoric: "Those guys would laugh at me for reading Peter

David's **Hulk**," admitted a bitter fan of Peter David's **Hulk**. "They'd dress in Elizabethan clothes and talk in blank verse, saying things like 'Fie! Fie! A plague on your House of Ideas!' I found it all quite intimidating."

While this was happening, the Speculator Boomers were becoming increasingly disillusioned with what was happening to their favourite Marvel characters. Spider-Man – once a down-at-heel freelance photographer working for the Daily Bugle – had become 80'd-up and gentrified: "This was someone I used to be able to relate to," snarled one fan in 1989. "Now he's living in a penthouse apartment with a supermodel wife. I hear he's going to spend an entire mini-series trying to find a filter for his cappuccino machine. What's cappuccino?"

For many of these fans, the speculator boom of the early 90s was the straw that broke the back of an already knackered camel. A new type of comic buyer had entered the fray: well-heeled, ill-bred Comicbook Carpetbaggers who were only interested in making a fast buck from the medium.

Above, over, next and right: Children of the evolution

Before long, many metropolitan comic stores began to resemble stock exchange trading floors. "They'd take their comics up to the counter and ask for 'extended settlement' and 'stop-loss limits,'" remembers one retailer. "One of them even wanted to 'short sell' on a hot title. He tried to sell me comics he hadn't bought yet so he could buy them back later at a lower price and skim the profit. I told him to 'Go to Hell!' and dragged him out of my shop by the collar of his bright red blazer."

To the dismay of long-term readers, Marvel seemed to pander to these fair weather fanboys and saturated the comics market with "enhanced product offerings". Pundits claim that during the first quarter of 1992 more Marvel titles were published than in the previous decade put together, while during a single month that year so many X-books were released that – taken together – they managed to contain every single word in the English language, twice. Cheap sales gimmicks only heightened tensions. An anniversary issue of **Punisher War Journal** was printed on milk, while a variant cover to Todd McFarlane's **Spider-Man #1** was actually bombarded with radiation, making it unsafe to read. One crossover saga was so convoluted that it actually became a Hofstadter Strange Loop and, a decade later, some readers are still believed to be trapped between two issues. This upsurge in quantity was combined with a downturn in quality: the migration of a new generation of hot artists to Image Comics resulted in the notorious Talent Famine of 1993, and at one stage an issue of **X-Factor** had to be pencilled by the office janitor. "I'd had enough of Marvel," remembers Jedediah. "My period of Doctor Estrangement had begun."

Stirred sequential glands

Once the Boomers had left, things went downhill for the company. Frustrated by the lack of day trading potential at conventions, the Carpetbaggers abandoned the comic industry and turned instead to the stock market where, for several years, they successfully over-inflated the value of companies in the technology sector. Marvel's sales dropped sharply, their share price plummeted and before long they were seeking Chapter 11 protection from bankruptcy. To many observers it looked as though the House of Ideas was on the verge of being repossessed by the mortgage firm.

By the time Joe Quesada and Jimmy Palmiotti were hired to breathe new life into some of their ailing titles in 1998, expectations were not running high. Marvel had already tried a similar stunt two years earlier with the ill-fated "Heroes Reborn" experiment, but this did little to reassure fandom's growing army of "Unhappy Ex-Men": Speculator Boomers wept at Rob Liefield's **Captain America** out of sorrow, while Iconoclasts laughed at the Speculator Boomers out of spite. When the Marvel Knight titles hit the spinner racks, though, there was a profoundly different reaction: "When I saw the cover to Kevin Smith's **Daredevil**," recalls Jedediah, "the hackles on my neck shot up. My sequential gland stirred for the first time in years and I was overcome with raw emotion, transfixed in a moment of sheer spiritual reawakening. It was my Epiphany. It was my *Road to Galactus*."

Smith & Quesada's **Daredevil** – with its combination of quality storytelling, modern sensibilities and abundant love for the character – was the catalyst for the whole BAM phenomenon, and before long Speculator Boomers like Jedediah were adding other Marvel Knight titles like **Black Panther** and **Inhumans** to their monthly standing orders. Once Quesada was appointed editor in chief, the Marvel Knight strategy was applied across the company's entire line of comics, and the pace of change accelerated. Top creative talents like Brian Michael Bendis, Grant Morrison & Mike Allred were lured away from rival superhero and indie publishers to help revive their flagship titles. The recruitment drive was even extended to artists and writers from other fields, and – following the successful film2comic transition of Kevin Smith – Quesada launched the Mighty Marvel Multimedia Migration Initiative. *Babylon 5* creator J. Michael Straczynski was appointed writer of **Amazing Spider-Man**, playwright/actor Chris Kipiniak was hired to create a **Nightcrawler** mini-series while the Bolshoi Ballet and Irish poet Seamus Heaney were rumoured to be collaborating on a Dazzler one-shot.

Even the Iconoclasts were feeling an irresistible urge to check out the New Marvel. "I remember," remembers Brad, "strange stories circulating amongst fans. Richard Corben was going to draw The Hulk, Alexandro Jodorowsky was reviving Alpha Flight and Robert Crumb was doing something with

The Scarlet Witch." He noticed friends and acquaintances – Boomers and Iconoclasts – had started reading Marvel comics again: "They seemed to be happier people for it, smiling constantly and even laughing from time to time. Due to my firm ideological beliefs, though, I tried to remain aloof and indifferent. Then one day I went to the local comic store and accidentally bought three consecutive back-issues of **Ultimate Spider-Man**. I remember trying to convince myself that I'd mistaken them for a bumper **Cerebus** collection, but deep down I knew that I was in the grip of some kind of involuntary bodily action – like a sneeze, or a fart. I was gripped by this wonderful story, but told myself that it was just an isolated outbreak of quality. In my heart of hearts, though, I knew that I would soon be mainlining on Marvel once again."

For both factions, this homecoming was an emotional experience. "It's a bit like being reunited with someone you used to love, someone you haven't seen for many years," says Jed, wistfully. "The last time you saw her, she wasn't the girl you met: she'd turned mean-spirited and nasty, an embodiment of evil that treated you like crap. But now, it's just like it was in the good old days. You realize that the girl that messed you around was some kind of malign alien symbiote energy creature, while the girl you originally loved had spent the last few years at the bottom of Jamaica Bay, in a cocoon."

Sad realities

The former Boomers were embraced by Marvel fans, and many comic stores arranged impromptu "Yellow Ribbon Mylar Bag Parties" to celebrate their return to the fold. For the Iconoclasts, though, it was a different story. "You get them in here every Wednesday," claims Dylan Scone, a surly Seattle comic store owner who asked to remain anonymous. "They hang around the store until it's quiet, then ask me if I know when the next issue of Grant Morrison's **X-Men** is due. Others try to sneak a copy of **Amazing Spider-Man** into a bundle of explicit Milo Manara albums, hoping nobody'll notice. Personally speaking, I can't stand 'em. If I had my way we'd ban those BAMs." Why does he feel so hostile towards these customers? "They used to come into my shop asking for titles I'd never heard of. I'd phone Diamond Distributors to place an order, but Diamond hadn't heard of 'em either. Later, I'd find out they didn't exist. This went on for years before I realized."

A typical comic shop during the Speculator Boom.

Some superhero fans have been equally unforgiving: "I've always been a Spidey reader – through thick and thin, sick and sin, Clone Saga and Chapter One – and now I see these "recovering Iconoclasts" buying **Ultimate**, **Amazing** and even **Peter Parker**. It makes me sick. A year ago the same people were prancing around the comic shop in frock coats saying that the death of Gwen Stacy was funny."

They say "Nostalgia ain't what it used to be", but that's just being sentimental. They say "You can't go home again", but for the BAMs that's clearly untrue. That doesn't stop some people from trying to change the locks on the doors, though. Those hostile to Reformed Iconoclasts like Brad – who can never forgive them for their past misdemeanors – should remember that the Marvel Universe they so cherish has had its fair share of villains like The Sandman and Magneto, who denounced their evil ways and found redemption. Granted, many of these characters end up reverting to villainy, but the point remains the same. If we cannot forgive and forget, then we are no better than those gangs of brutal, sectarian children who fought for the honour of their favourite comic company. And what's more, if those Marvel Boys really have grown into Marvel Men, they'd better watch out. There may be a messy legal battle coming their way. BL

THIS IS NO JOKE DEN ...
WE'VE GOT TIMES PLACES AND DATES - I'VE GOT TO TAKE YOU IN.
NOW ...
LET'S NOT MAKE THIS ANY HARDER THAN IT ALREADY IS ...

Getting Kaned

WITH the publication of **Jack Staff** #6 has come the announcement that **Kane**, critically acclaimed firstborn title from Paul Grist's Dancing Elephant Press, will be changing format and frequency, effective immediately. Issue 31 of **Kane**, already on the shelves, will be the last issue of the pop culture crime series.

Grist told **Borderline**: "The problem [with **Kane**'s sales] is that they've reached a level and stuck - and I can't do anything to push them a bit higher."

The trade paperback collections of **Kane** continue to sell well, bolstered by interest in the second Dancing Elephant Press title, **Jack Staff**.

Future **Kane** stories will appear as complete original graphic novels, solicited when ready. Grist anticipates that the first will be published within the next 18 months. In the meantime, he will now be able to concentrate on keeping **Jack Staff** on a regular schedule.

On the subject of **Kane** subscribers, Grist explained: "As far as the subs go, all outstanding subscribers will receive a copy of the first book when it comes out, and that will bring their sub to an end."

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FAREWELL TO THE FF – BUT NOT FOREVER

Loeb vows to return to the World's Greatest Comics Magazine

FANTASTIC FOUR #50, on sale in December, will be the last to feature the scripting skills of Jeph Loeb - for the time being.

The writer is keen to return to the series in the future - plotting and scripting the stories, rather than writing a script based on Carlos Pacheco's plots and pencils.

That's not to say that the arrangement with Pacheco was uncomfortable. Loeb told **Borderline**: "Yes, sadly, #50 will be my last issue - for now. Sadly, because working with Carlos has been one of the great pleasures of my comic book career. He is a gentleman in every sense of the word. Concerned. Generous. And funny! He's very funny and sometimes, because of the language barrier, he is even funnier than he knows! I love this man."

What were his personal high points?

"I have wanted to write the Fantastic Four since I began reading comics," he said. "They are characters I know backwards and forwards and being able to put words in their mouths was a kick every month.

"Carlos is a superior draftsman and a superb artist. I truly believe that since Kirby - and I have great respect for Byrne and Romita and Buscema, to name a few - there hasn't been a voice on the book artistically as strong as Carlos.

"People say that you can only judge an FF artist by how well he draws the Thing. Well... Carlos met that challenge and surpassed it. I don't envy *any* artist who follows him."

How did the writing arrangement with Pacheco work?

Loeb said: "I don't know if the readers understood how much of the story was completed by the time it got to me. Carlos and Rafael (Marin) would work out the plot, meaning the entire story, page for page, with input from Editorial. Carlos - or the fill-in artist - would then pencil and someone else - Jesus Marin in Carlos's case - would then ink the book.

"So, by the time I got the book, I was given a plot and fully inked pages. That meant no corrections, and no digressions from the plot - even if I would have told the story in a different way.

"Everyone has their own vision, and for this book it was Carlos's - and my job was to help him clarify that vision. I don't know if I did a good job - I never do - but *he* was happy and that made me very happy."

He added: "But, so we're clear - I enjoyed the stories Carlos was telling. He told them with great passion for the characters - which I adore - and a fanboy's excitement - which I envy.

"They were not, however, my stories. And after a year of essentially helping Carlos realize his vision - a wonderful job, but different for a writer - it was time to move on.

"I think if Carlos were staying on as permanent artist, it might have been different, but I found the fill-in issues, which were five out of 12, very difficult to do simply because even Carlos deviated from the plot when it made for better storytelling. The fill-in guys - deservedly so - felt they couldn't do that, and it made the tales more difficult to tell."

How did he feel about leaving it behind?

"I learned a great lesson on this book," Loeb said. "I am surprised I haven't learned it sooner. If you want something and you work hard enough toward that goal, you can achieve it.

"That may seem fairly simple, but I've worked on every major icon - with a little luck! - and hadn't been able to get to the FF. Now, times change, people change, editors change and I was given that chance.

"What I learned was that things will change again - including my creative juices - and I will be back. I don't know when, or how - and I'm not getting all fatalistic about this - I just know that when I have a series of really fun, uplifting tales of the Fantastic Four, no one short of Doc Doom himself will keep me from telling those stories. And I can't wait for that inspiration!"

He said: "Until then, I think Karl Kesel is a wonderful choice to replace me as scripter - he has the same boyhood passion for the voices - and after #54 it's a great big ol' mystery who is coming on board. It will be interesting!" **BL**

GO BACK WHERE YA CAME FROM YA BUM!
JUSTIN LEMME GET UP --
-- AN' I'LL CLOBBER THE VESH OI A --
YOU COULDN'T CLOBBER MY GRANDMA, YA ROCKHEAD!
HEY, JIMMY, YOU WANNA GIVE ME SOME ROOM HERE?
SURE 'MING, PETER RIGHT AFTER I GET MY SHOT. I'LL BE UP, UP AND AWAY.
THE GREY GARGOYLE'S POWERS MUST HAVE INTEGRATED WITH DIABLO'S "AURUM POTABLE" STILL IN YOUR SYSTEM --
YEAH. YEAH. WHATEVER.
CHA
CLUK

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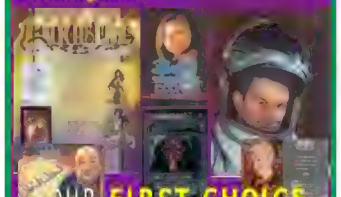
I will be at the following UK shows: **Manchester**, Sacha's Hotel: 17th Nov. **Liverpool**, Gladstone Hotel: 18th Nov. **Birmingham**, Carrs Lane: 24th Nov, **Leeds** University: 8th Dec. **Sheffield** Hallam University: 10th Nov. **Newcastle** University: 1st Dec. **Memorabilia NEC Birmingham**: 3rd/4th Nov.

YOUR FIRST CHOICE FOR ALL TRADING CARDS

Gaiman takes his miracles to Marvel

MARVEL Comics is to publish a new project by Neil Gaiman - and donate all the profits to a new company Gaiman has set up.

Marvels and Miracles LLC was created by Gaiman to clarify the rights to the critically acclaimed **Miracleman**.

The new project marks the first time in seven years that Marvel and Gaiman have worked together. It is currently under development by Marvel's Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada and Gaiman, and will most likely see publication in 2002.

Gaiman said he was particularly pleased that Marvel has agreed to donate all their profits from this project to the Marvels and Miracles enterprise.

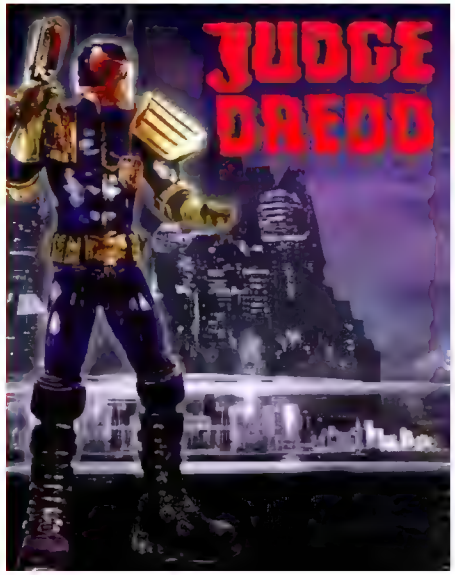
He said: "Once those rights have become clear, I plan to dedicate all of the profits which any **Miracleman** publishing might generate, beyond those needed to make sure that the original creators are being properly paid, to comics-related charitable organizations."

Gaiman is the award-winning creator/writer of

DC Comics' series **The Sandman**.

Double judgement over Hollywood

INTENDING to shrug off the box office dud that was Sylvester Stallone's 1995 *Judge Dredd* film, **2000AD** publisher Rebellion has signed a two-picture deal with Shoreline.



Morris Ruskin, co-partner of Shoreline, confirmed: "We are reinventing the franchise by taking it back to the edge and style of the original comic book."

Shoreline will co-produce the two films with Jason Kingsley and Andy Prendergast of Rebellion. Kingsley, CEO of Rebellion, said: "We are really excited about the Dredd franchise going into production and aim to release the 'Dredd vs Death' [long in development computer] game to coincide with the release of the film." Early word suggests that the films have working titles of *Judge Dredd: Dredd Reckoning* and *Judge Dredd: Possession*.

Dredd Reckoning features Dredd developing doubts about the legal system he is sworn to uphold, and facing the consequences. *Possession* will adapt the story of Dredd's most famous adversary, Judge Death, a grotesque undead caricature of the future lawman.

Give Me Liberty

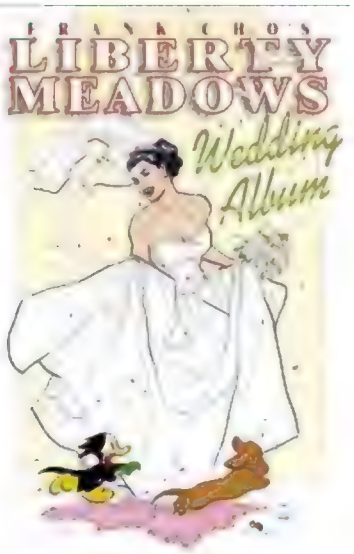
IN an industry where many comics creators would do pretty much anything to break into the lucrative syndicated newspaper strip market, this December Frank Cho will make the unprecedented move of deserting newspapers for comics.

Cho explained: "**Liberty Meadows** the comic strip will transform itself into **Liberty Meadows**, the comic book. Okay, I'll be the first to admit that there's already a comic book called **Liberty Meadows**. Hey, we publish it, so I know all about it. (Trust me on this one.)"

On the last day of 2001, **Liberty Meadows** the newspaper strip ends with a bang - a big cliffhanger revolving around the wedding of heroine Brandy. Throughout December, the relationship at the core of the series, between animal psychologist Brandy and veterinarian Frank, is sorely tested when Brandy accepts a proposal of marriage from someone else.

By special arrangement with the syndicate handling the strip, Cho may well be making the most concerted attempt ever to take the mainstream audience, who will happily follow the Sunday funnies but shy away from comic books, and drag them into the comic shop.

Mark Wheatley of Insight



Studios, publishers of the **Liberty Meadows** comic book, elaborated: "The **Liberty Meadows** comic book was born from overwhelming demand for a collected edition of the strip. As each issue continues to climb in sales, it became obvious that readers really cared about Brandy, Frank, Oscar, Dean and the rest of the gang. With the cooperation of Creators Syndicate, we're going to be doing some extraordinary things to promote the comic book - and comic shops - to the strip's avid readership."

The resolution of the cliffhanger will only appear in the **Liberty Meadows Wedding Album**, which will only be available from comic shops. The storyline will take place outside the continuity of the regular strip, and will be published in January 2002.

THE LOCAL RUGGER TEAM ARE ALWAYS SURROUNDED BY TONS OF GIRLS WHO DROP THEIR DRAWERS FOR A BAG OF CRISPS! I'M BOUND TO SCORE IN HERE!
RUGBY PLAYERS ARMS
OOOH, HELLO HANDSOME! WE ENJOYED DRESSING UP AS WOMEN FOR STAG NIGHTS SO MUCH THAT WE'VE ALL DECIDED TO DO IT PERMANENTLY AND APPLY FOR SEX-CHANGE OPERATIONS ON THE N.H.S!
...AND WE'RE RENAMING THE PUB "THE FLYING TACKLE".
AAGH!
OOH, LET'S GET HIM IN THE COMMUNAL BATH, "GIRLS"!

Tranny Magnet

BRITISH readers may recall a time, not so many years ago, when the adult humour comic **Viz** was the fifth top-selling magazine in the UK, rivalling *Radio Times* for the Number One slot. Sales were over a phenomenal one million per issue, with a readership estimated at five times that amount as copies of **Viz** circulated around student common rooms, offices, and factories throughout the land. Not bad for a comic that had started out as a bit of a laugh for its creators: Chris and Simon Donald, who printed 200 copies of the first issue to sell around local pubs and record shops in their Newcastle area, way back in 1979.

Today, **Viz** may not be the million-seller it was, but it still holds its own with impressive sales of 220,000 per issue. Quite an achievement in these times, when most comics barely sell more than a tenth of that figure!

Recently, the press reported that **Viz** had "sold out" to a new owner. As usual, the media had misinterpreted the story. The truth is that James Brown, the original editor of *Loaded*, bought the 50% share previously owned by John Brown Publishing, who had been invaluable in getting **Viz** in more outlets and expanding its popularity. Creatively, **Viz** is still in the safe hands of the lads who have nurtured it so well over the past 22 years (except for Chris Donald, who retired from the business two years ago). Although the comic has recently been upgraded to glossy paper, all the favourites are still there; *The Fat Slags*, *Sid the Sexist*, *Nobby's Piles*, plus new characters too.

One such new character makes his debut in issue 111, on sale from November 22nd. *Tranny Magnet* is a hapless 45-year old loser who, after being bitten by a radioactive Scotsman for laughing at his kilt, is forevermore cursed to only attract transsexuals and transvestites. The strip is written and drawn by cartoonist Lew Stringer, a regular contributor to **Viz** and an established writer/artist in British comics for the last 18 years. Stringer is probably best known for *Tom Thug*, which ran in **Oink!** and **Buster** for ten years, and *Combat Colin*, which had a four-year run in **Transformers** in the 1980s. "As with most of my characters, you're laughing *at* Tranny Magnet, not *with* him," explains Stringer. "I always felt that characters in UK comics like **Whoopee!** often let the strips down and extinguished all the humour because they were portrayed as your fictional 'pals', rather than being the butt of the jokes. Hell, these characters aren't real, so let's enjoy watching them make fools of themselves! I prefer the 'Laurel and Hardy' approach, rather than the 'Charlie Chaplin' heroic underdog style of comedy.

"Viz is part of that British seaside postcard nudge-nudge kind of humour," he continued. "Quite juvenile and emotionally stunted, you could say (if one was a student with nowt better to do than analyse comics that is). My inspiration for *Tranny Magnet* is *Carry On* films and *On the Buses*. That late sixties/early seventies adolescent nonsense of ugly blokes in frocks, dolly birds, and slapstick. Tranny Magnet himself looks a bit like Bernie Winters, with the sexist attitude of Reg Varney's Stan Butler, and the despondency of Hancock. No wonder he's unlucky with the ladies."

The Wizard of Odd

JAY Stephens, creator of **The Land of Nod** and **Atomic City Tales**, is revisiting some of his earliest work in January 2002 when Oni Press releases a collection of his long out of print newspaper strips, **Oddville**.

The series introduced the character with which Stephens has become synonymous - Jetcat - which was turned into a Nickelodeon animated series in 1999, and is currently featuring in Oni's **Jetcat Clubhouse**.

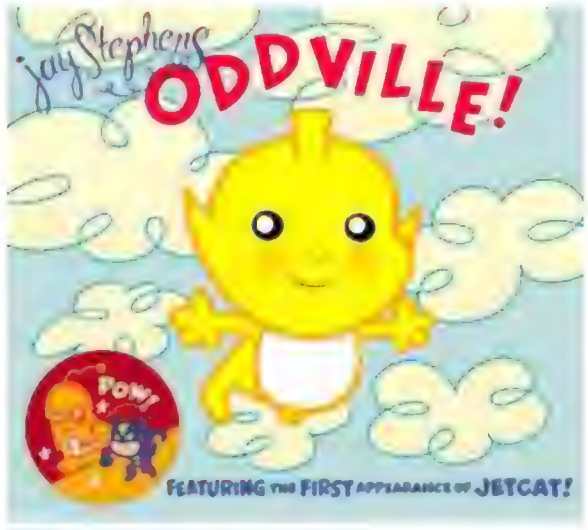
Oddville begins with something as innocent as a kiss and takes the reader on a surreal chase through the town of the title, encountering a flying baby, mad scientists, zombie rock bands, giant monkeys and robots.

Stephens commented: "It's odd looking at **Oddville** after all this time, to say the least. But I think it's good to keep this material alive, since if you want to see where my art is headed, you should take a look at where I've been.

With Jetcat's origins about to be unearthed, it seems unfortunate timing for **Jetcat Clubhouse** to be going on hiatus after issue 4. Oni editor in chief Jamie S. Rich explained: "Jay has decided, with so much of his work being reprinted next year, that he should refocus his efforts and possibly work towards more self-contained projects. While this doesn't mean there will be no new **Jetcat** in our future, this is all we have planned for now and in this format."

In April, Oni will be continuing its association by publishing the first collected volume of Stephens's **Atomic City Tales**.

Joe Nozemack, Oni publisher, added: "When comic strips began early in the century, they were distinct for their whimsical nature and unbridled enthusiasm. **Oddville** recaptures that spirit and reminds us what a great storytelling medium this format could be."



THE LUNATICKS HAVE TAKEN OVER THE ASYLUM

Jay Eales talked to Steve Lightle about Lunaticks, with the odd song reference thrown in!

LUNATICK Press is the brainchild of artist Steve Lightle, and the first fruit of his self-published labours is **Peking Tom & Bobbi Sox**, available at selected outlets or direct from the Lunatick Press website, at: *(www.geocities.com/lunaticks2001/index.html)*

Borderline caught up with Lightle to find out if the name of his company reflects his mental state or the perceived folly of launching another comics imprint on an unsuspecting world…

Borderline: How long have you been working in comics?

Steve Lightle: It's been a Long and Winding Road that leads to your door. I've always been an artist of some kind, scribbling things to hang on the refrigerator... That just naturally leads a person to working in comics. We probably all start out life with a touch of the artist in us. All children draw stuff, right? Of course, if they aren't careful, they could all end up as comic artists. I mean, some people interrupt the cycle. I just never did. I went from drawing monsters that I saw on television, to drawing super heroes that I saw in my big brother's comic book collection. By the time I was thirteen I had decided that I wanted to draw comics for a living. Of course, I kind of hoped that I wouldn't have to wait until I was fourteen to realize my ambitions. As it turned out, since no cartoon talent scouts searched me out, I finally decided to take matters into my own hands. When I was fifteen, I scraped together enough loose change to print my own comic, showcasing my developing skills at telling stories with words and pictures. I wrote and drew several issues of **The Power Masters**... that was the name of my comic. Through that, I met several people who eventually made an impact on the world of professional comics. **The Power Masters** didn't have a big readership, but it did have a creative one. People like Jerry Ordway, Doug Mahnke, John Beatty, John Bogdanove, Dave Sim, and Kerry Gammill, all came to my attention as a result of that little black and white self published comic. Oh yeah... I later went on to do a few books for DC and Marvel. Can't forget those.

BL: What was your "big break"?

SL: That'll Be the Day... I mean, maybe it's still to come. I'd like to think that the really good stuff is just around the next corner. I remember a while back when Todd McFarlane was asked a similar question, in some interview or another, he said that his big break came as a result of my passing up **Infinity Inc**., which they then offered to him. I'm sure Todd's star would have shone with or without that particular break, but that was his answer. I guess my answer would have to be, my big break came when my art samples were seen by the editor of DC's **New Talent Showcase**. As soon as I started sending in those first **NTS** pages, offers started coming my way. If I had drawn every book that was offered back then... well, your Steve Lightle collection would be twice as large... and I probably would have died of exhaustion in the late '80s.

BL: What made you decide to take the leap into self-publishing? And why now?

SL: In the words of Patsy Cline, I'm Crazy... crazy for thinking about... well, about publishing. It's certainly not the sensible or conservative thing to do. Not only is the comic biz making a slow recovery from a killer slump, but the nation's economy is very uncertain right now. All I know is, it was time to get back to where I once belonged. You see, I do a lot of art outside of comics. In fact, I was doing commercial art before I got my "big break" in comics. Sometimes my comic book experience and my other interests dovetail nicely. Like when I design toys or collaborate with game programmers. I've also frequently drawn comic book characters, like Spider-Man, Batman, Superman, X-Men, etc., for a number of non-comic book projects. But, you know what? Every Picture Tells A Story, and comic books are a great medium for visual storytelling. So, although I am not turning away from the world of commercial art, I'm certainly ready for some Ch-ch-ch-changes. Lunatick Press is just my way of getting back to the comic book storytelling that I've always loved, while acknowledging that the idea of self publication, at this point in my career, is a little nutso. Another important aspect of Lunatick Press is the creative freedom to do whatever I want, in whatever way I choose. At the end of the day, I can say I Did It My Way.

BL: How regularly do you intend to publish titles through Lunatick Press? Will there be a rigid schedule, or is it going to be something looser, fitted around your work-for-hire commitments until such time that it becomes a runaway success and you can concentrate on it full time?

SL: Time has come today... time... that's what it all comes down to. Time and money... yeah, that's what I want. If I have time and money to spend on it, then Lunatick Press will Shake, Rattle and Roll for a long while. I've already published, quietly, while nobody was looking- sneaky, ain't I? - the first issue of **Peking Tom and Bobbi Sox**. It's black and white, just like **The Power Masters**, and it's intended as kind of a preview of what can be expected of Lunatick Press. I kept the price incredibly low, so people have been a little surprised when they see the quality of materials that went into the making of the book. My hope is that **Peking Tom & Bobbi Sox** will be seen as the kind of comic that you don't find so often these days... an affordable, enjoyable distraction. And unlike movies or online entertainment, this is a chunk of solid matter. You can revisit it anytime you want. It's like a Permanent Vacation. Okay, okay... or you could just throw it in the dumpster once you've had your giggles. It's cheap enough that you can buy it just to read it, and not feel cheated. The first comic is a Grab Bag, because it introduces readers to several upcoming Lunatick Press projects. There's light-hearted stuff, like **Buster and Blooper**, **Catrina Fellina**, and of course, **Peking Tom and Bobbi Sox**. There are also previews of adventure, superhero, fantasy and horror books that I already have in the works. The next title from Lunatick, by the way, is a futuristic super hero thingy called **Justin Zane**, and from the reaction I've been getting from readers of **Peking Tom and Bobbi Sox #1**, I think that book might just catch on. Frankly Scarlet, I'd love to be in a position to spend all of my time on these pet projects. Lunatick Press is simply the place where I can express my craziest, most creative, urges. I'm thinking that, if you've enjoyed any of the work I've done before, you should be a little bit curious about what I can do in this kind of situation. The thing is, you have to ask yourself, are you ready for what's to come? BL

Huge promotional assault as The Dark Knight Strikes again

FRANK Miller and Lynn Varley's eagerly-awaited - and in some corners pre-judged - **The Dark Knight Strikes Again** hits stores on December 5.

The sequel to **The Dark Knight Returns** (1986) has become a legend even before its release, but the promotional campaign by publishers DC Comics promises to be monumental.

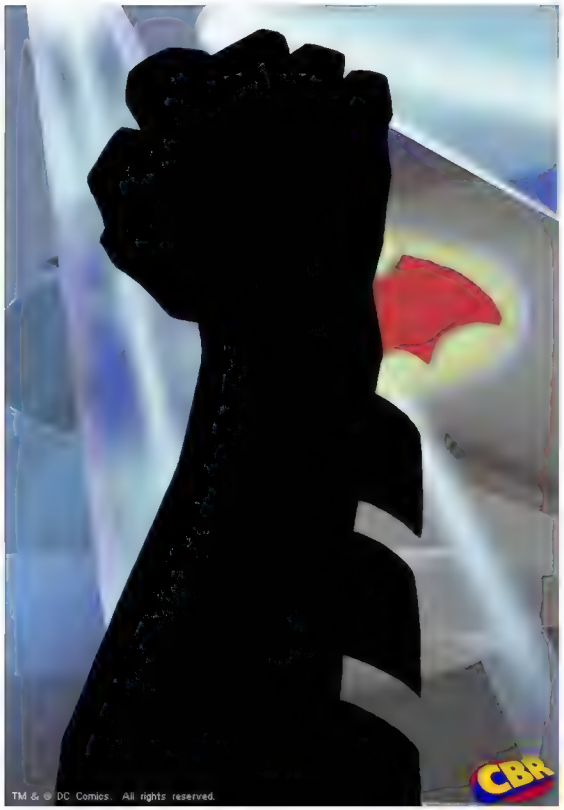
In stores, an oversized promotional poster is scheduled to arrive on November 7, followed by a countertop display and 'Now on Sale window poster scheduled to arrive on November 28.

But since the announcement of **DK2**, Miller and the Dark Knight have garnered heavy mainstream coverage, landing on the pages of *Entertainment Weekly*'s exclusive "It List" and *Rolling Stone*'s "Hot List."

Articles are also planned to appear in *Spin* and *Maxim*. DC anticipates a groundswell of coverage from entertainment journalists.

Trade ads will appear in *Wizard*, *Comic Shop News*, *Comics Buyer's Guide*, *Comics & Games Retailer*, *Comics International*, *Sketch Magazine*, *GamePro Magazine* and *Dark Age of Camelot Strategy Guide*.

A flash animation trailer at dccomics.com is scheduled to be on the website in late November. Bob Wayne, DC's VP (Sales & Marketing), said: "I'm now extremely confident that fans will be excited by it. In fact, they're going to be bowled over by just how good it is. I have every expectation that this enthusiasm will translate into phenomenal sales on each issue."



Peter David comes to Chaos!

SCRIPTING celebrity Peter David (**The Incredible Hulk**) has gone to Chaos! Comics to produce the script for **The Haunted**.

He has been joined by fan favorite penciller Nat Jones (Image's **Hellspawn**), inker Kevin Conrad (**Kiss: Psycho Circus**) and colourist Todd Broeker (**Spawn: The Dark Ages**).

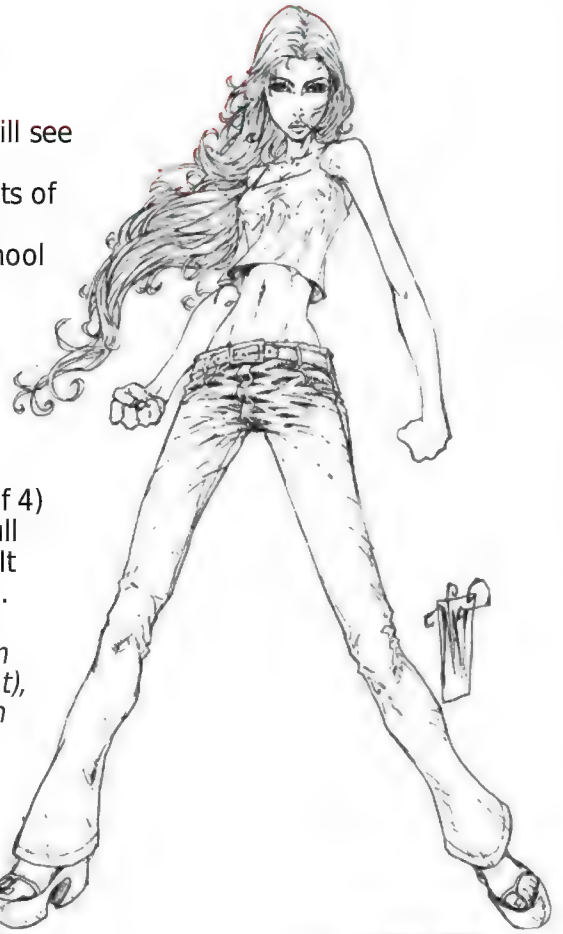
David asks: "What do you do when your every instinct tells you it's time to hit the road and go on the run...but your only vehicle has transmission trouble and nobody's got gas money?

"If you're the ragtag teens known as The Haunted, you head back to school, challenge your pursuers to take their best shot, and hope your occult and mysterious powers will see you through.

"But when the spirits of dead students begin manifesting in the school library, The Haunted have to take them out of circulation before some rather stiff late return penalties are invoked."

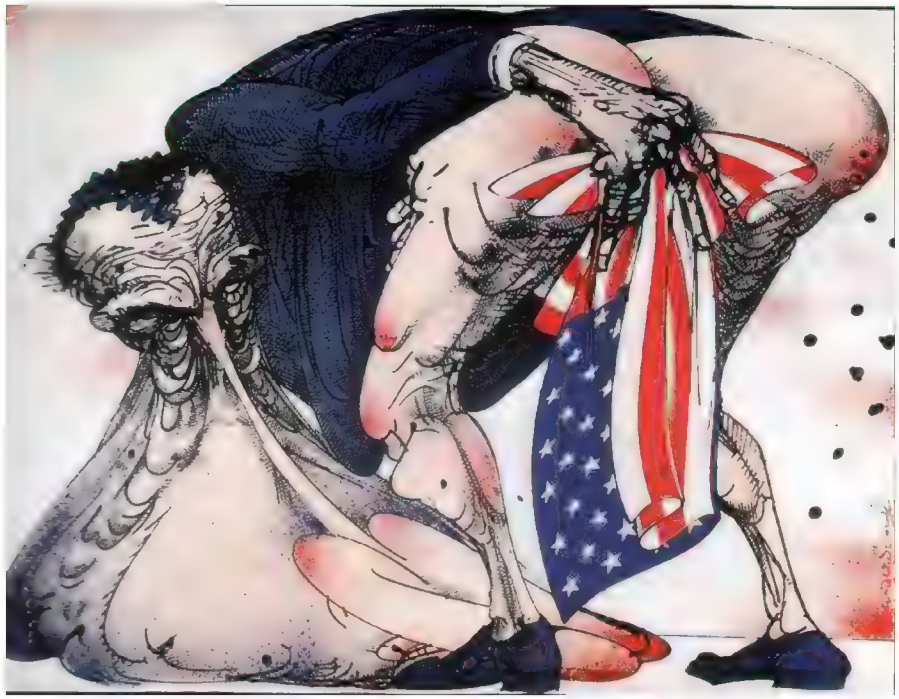
The Haunted #2 (of 4) runs to 32 pages in full colour, priced $2.99. It ships on November 1.

Pictures: Brick (bottom left), Cat (bottom right), Celia (right) and Stitch (below)



SCARFE-FACE

Gerald Scarfe is probably Britain's premier political cartoonist and caricaturist. Mike Sivier caught up with him and his work at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature last month.



GERALD SCARFE first showed his potential when he won a competition to design an advert in **The Eagle**. He takes great satisfaction from the fact that David Hockney - yes, *that* David Hockney - was a runner-up.

That's his sole connection with comicbooks, so if you're looking for the revelation of his secret **Batman** project, the next page is just a mouse-click away.

For the rest of you, Scarfe's journey to political cartooning and caricature probably started in a hospital ward. He suffered from chronic asthma as a child, and spent much of his early life surrounded by the elderly and the dying.

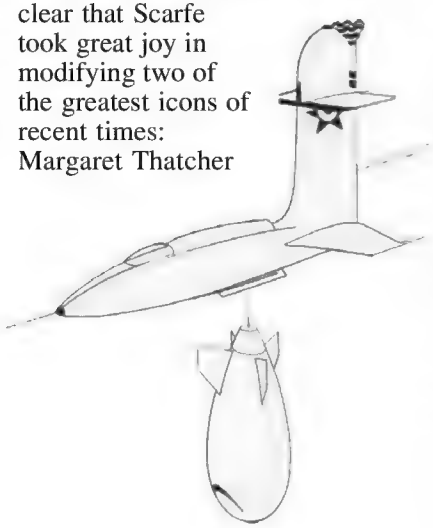
He says this may have coloured his worldview, and could explain why his cartooning concentrates on the grotesque or morbid.

With time on his hands, Scarfe took to art, producing sketches and paintings to pass the days.

His talent was evident from the beginning, and was honed when he was hired to produce art for an advertising company.

Years of drawing items of stationery and household furniture in pinpoint-accurate detail took him to the limits of tedium, so when **Private Eye** spearheaded the satire renaissance of the 1960s, Scarfe's work quickly became a fixture. Commissions from newspapers and other current affairs periodicals soon followed.

Who are his favourite subjects? Whilst not expressing a preference in as many words, it is clear that Scarfe took great joy in modifying two of the greatest icons of recent times: Margaret Thatcher and Richard Nixon.



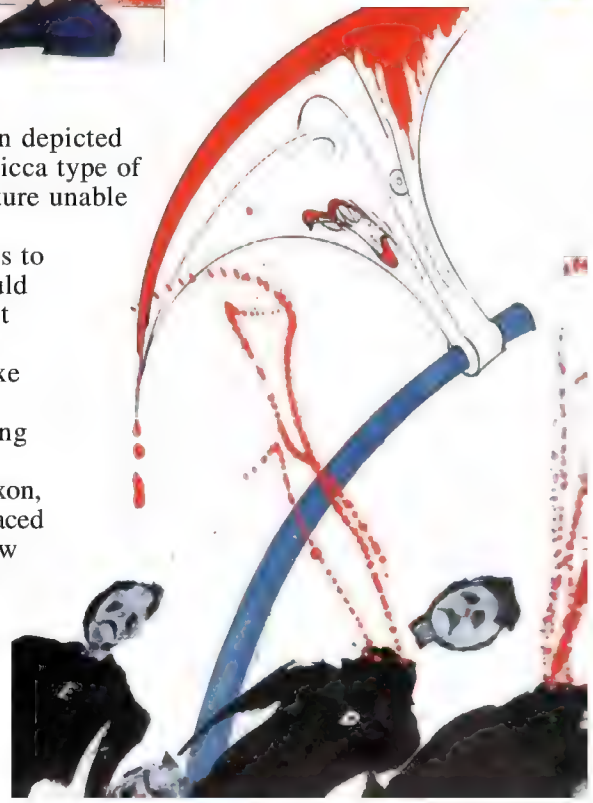
Thatcher has been depicted variously as a Boudicca type of figure; a blind creature unable to see poverty, unemployment, arms to Iraq, or that she could ever be wrong about anything; and, most memorably, as an axe falling on Britain's unsuspecting working classes.

When he drew Nixon, Scarfe said the disgraced President's jowls grew to such a degree that they eventually detached themselves from his face and started a life of their own. This was how Scarfe was able to show Nixon as a bomber plane - his jowls were the falling bombs.

In the 1980s Scarfe brought his work to cinema audiences when he produced animated sequences for the film version of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. More recently, he returned to movie animation with - of all things - Disney's *Hercules*. "They had notes on how to turn Scarfe into animation," he said. "So they all knew how to draw a chin or an arm."

Scarfe's political cartooning career continues to this day. Among his most recent work was a response to the World Trade Centre tragedy of September 11.

The image was an American flag, in the shape of a heart, ripped through the centre. BL



Captain America on the run

Hard-Hitting adventure leads up to Marvel Knights relaunch!

MARVEL'S super soldier Captain America makes his Marvel Knights debut in April next year, when his new series by John Ney Reiber and John Cassaday launches.

Before that, three creators new to Marvel - and one new to the comics industry itself - will push the shield-slinger to the edge in the three-issue monthly series **Captain America: Dead Man Running**.

Newly-promoted editor Andrew Lis has assembled the trio to deliver an adventure that will force Steve Rogers to confront the problems of today's world - and rethink his very existence.

The series is written by Darko Macan, illustrated by Danijel Zezelj, and features painted covers by Derek Hess.

Macan won an Eisner Award for **Grendel Tales: Devils and Deaths**, and is writing the upcoming **Sandman Presents: The Corinthian series**.

Zezelj, known for his work on Vertigo's **Congo Bill** and **El Diablo**, has also created pieces for the *New York Times Book Review*.

Hess, whose paintings have appeared in *Spin* and *Juxtapoz* magazines, also created tour posters for Limp Bizkit and CD art for Tommy Lee's Methods of Mayhem project. His posters are currently on display both in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the world-famous Louvre museum in Paris.

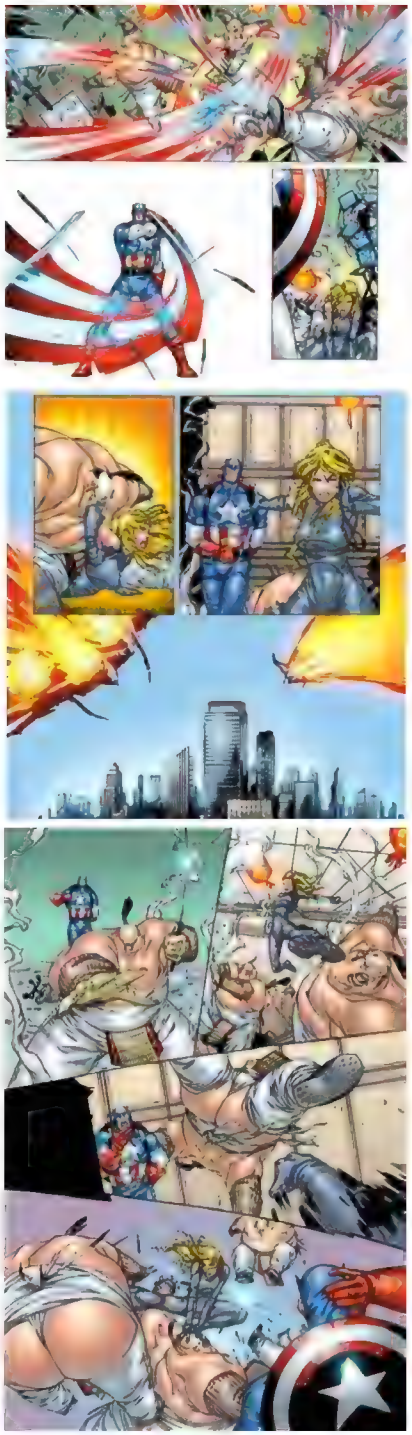
Captain America: Dead Man Running finds the Star-Spangled Avenger deep in the South American jungle after responding to a distress call from a squad of US covert agents.

But Cap soon discovers that the soldiers - and the refugees they are protecting - are on the run not only from their common enemy, but from justice itself.

Attempting to stay one step ahead of their pursuers, the Sentinel of Liberty will confront troubling questions, including: What should you do when you discover that the actions of those you are protecting fly in the face of everything you believe? What do you do when you find yourself an icon of forgotten times, a symbol of ideals no longer revered? And if you're Captain America, how do you keep going - especially if you're facing evil that a shield and a strong right cross cannot defeat?

Editor Andrew Lis said of the project: "This is a Captain America series with a very different tone, and a big part of that feel comes from the fact that these creators are bringing a completely different voice to Marvel.

"Joe Quesada has been very supportive as we pursue new talent, and has been instrumental in bringing creators like Derek Hess, Darko Macan, and Danijel Zezelj to Marvel."

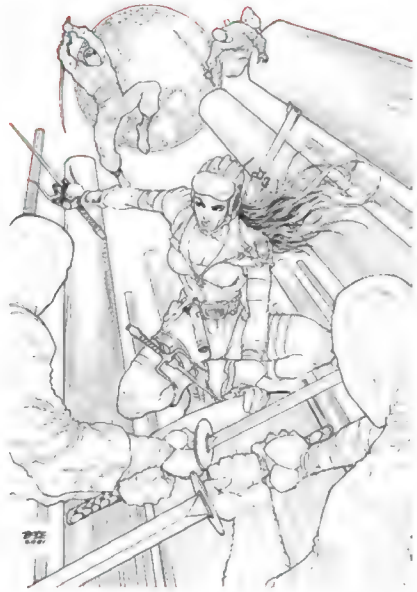


Visions of Elektra

THE **Marvel Knights Millennial Visions** one-shot hits comic shops on December 5.

Editor Mike Marts has asked creators to imagine what their favourite Marvel Knights will be doing in the future. Those creators include Tim Bradstreet, Alex Maleev, and JH Williams III.

For a taste of what's coming, Marvel has offered this pin-up by Ryan Bodenheim, one of Marvel's New Talent Search winners, featuring Elektra as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. Ryan will soon be illustrating a Wolverine story.



Book shows the ABC of comics sketches

AMERICA'S Best Comics Sketchbook may seem a boastful claim - but in this case it is the literal truth.

Due in stores on December 12, this 48-page, $5.95 book features a myriad of sketches, illustrations and concept drawings, showing how the characters from Promethea, Top 10, Tom Strong and Tomorrow Stories came to be.

America's Best Comics Sketchbook has art, commentary and a cover by Arthur Adams, Hilary Barta, Gene Ha, Kevin Nowlan, Alex Ross, Chris Sprouse, Rick Veitch and the team of JH Williams III and Mick Gray.

Cage is hellbound

NICOLAS Cage is set to realize a long-held dream in March 2002, when filming begins on *Constantine*, an adaptation of the DC Vertigo comic series **Hellblazer**.

Cage, real name Coppola, took his stage name from Luke Cage, Marvel's eponymous Power Man, and has been associated with more comic book film projects than Wesley Snipes and Johnny Depp combined. At various times, Cage has been linked with *Ghost Rider*, *Iron Man* and even *Superman* proposals.

Constantine will be directed by Tarsem Singh, who made his movie debut with *The Cell*, starring Jennifer Lopez. In the source comic book, John Constantine is a Liverpudlian chancer and mystical confidence trickster. Early drafts of the film script relocated the setting from London to New York and teamed Constantine with a woman police officer, but after much dissent the scriptwriter had a change of heart and attempted to persuade the producers to allow Constantine to remain an Englishman. Cage's casting would suggest that the attempt was unsuccessful.

FURTHER DOWN THE SPIRAL

AL DAVISON, artist of several DC Vertigo titles, is to produce a sequel to his most celebrated work, **The Spiral Cage**.

Davison spoke to **Borderline** about the difficulties in bringing such a personal work to publication: "I am currently developing a sequel to the first volume of my autobiography **The Spiral Cage**, published in 1990 by Titan Books. Whereas the first volume dealt with my experiences as a 'disabled' person, the current project, **Scar Tissue,** catalogues my experiences of child abuse.

"This is admittedly a difficult subject, especially when you combine disability with the issues of abuse. I felt that it was worth doing, having spoken to many other survivors who - for the most part - felt unable to articulate their own experiences or felt isolated by those same experiences.

"I should point out that this is ultimately a positive book, focusing on how I overcame these experiences, and use them to help others."

One of the ways Davison works with others is through Martial Hearts, a charity for disabled martial arts practitioners. Details of the charity can be found at: *www.astralgypsy.com/martialhearts/index.html*

Elaborating upon how he will illustrate the book, Davison continued: "I am using three different art styles: firstly and predominantly, an objective realistic style, using photo-reference for locations, people, etc. This is to give as accurate an interpretation of the events as possible. Secondly, a naïve/subjective child-like style, to try to express my feelings as a child responding to the events. Finally, for the dream sequences, I'm working on black paper with white gouache.

"Also I'm colouring the book in Photoshop, still learning the finer points of this. Regular phone workshops with Dave Gibbons are proving invaluable."

He said: "The Apple Mac has made an immense difference to my work, especially from a health point of view. I suffered badly from carpal tunnel syndrome in my drawing hand, and was often unable to grip a pencil or brush. The pressure-controlled graphics tablet means I can achieve the same results without having to put my hand under such strain.

"Being able to do all the preparatory work for the comics on the Mac, and to erase and re-draw so easily, has helped with the ME [Myalgic Encephalomyelitis], improving my energy levels.

"Speaking of the ME," he added, "one of the early side effects of the condition was temporary blindness, though I didn't realise that it wasn't permanent at the time. This is to be the subject of a further volume.

"I am currently trying to publish a small set of prints using the drawings I did while blind, and marketing other prints and paintings on my website, in order to try and fund the work on **Scar Tissue**, as I don't have a publisher yet. It's not the kind of project that I can do piecemeal, so I hope to raise enough to allow me to spend a year working on the project, and publish it myself if I don't find a publisher by the time it's completed. I already have two sponsors offering £1,000 each, if others will match the amount. Just need 28 more and I will be set! Obviously I am also interested in finding any short-term comics work that would also help fund this."

Anyone wishing to help with the financing of **The Spiral Cage 2: Scar Tissue**, or interested in buying a piece of art is urged to visit *www.astralgypsy.com*, where the Astral Gypsy Press has a collection of Al Davison's fine art prints for sale. Al also has a collection of original paintings for sale, which can be viewed at *www.astralgypsy.com/paintings.html* BL

Miffy
Terry Wiley & Adrian Kermode
OOH!
WHAT?
I'VE JUST HAD A WEIRD PREMONITION THAT I'M GOING TO HAVE DEJA VU...
OOH!
WHAT?
I HAVE THIS WEIRD FEELING I'VE HAD THAT PREMONITION BEFORE!

I Don't Know Art, But I Know What I Like

MAURICIO de Sousa is the focus of an exhibition currently on show at the São Paulo Art Museum. The exhibits come from Mauricio's collection of paintings featuring his **Mônica's Gang** characters paying homage to some of the most famous works of art. This is the first time that they have been on public display since he began the project.

Mauricio explained: "What began 10 years ago as pure fun, with a painting of Mônica and Maggy in a pose like that of the two girls in Renoir's 'Pink and Blue', eventually developed into a full scale creative project aimed at introducing children to world-renowned art in a light-hearted way."

Some of Mauricio's favourite masterpieces are represented, including da Vinci's "Mona Lisa", parodied as "Mônica Lisa". Parodies of other masters such as Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Monet, Velasquez and Goya total 46 paintings in all, while Mônica's nemesis Jimmy Five is recast in the role of Rodin's sculpture "The Thinker". Each painting is hung side by side with a print of the original for comparison, together with short biographies of the artists. Visitors to the exhibition may also pick up an illustrated catalogue as a keepsake.

Visitors will be able to view the collection in São Paulo until the end of December 2001, when it goes on the road, starting in other Brazilian cities before going on to Europe and the Americas.

Borderline asked how the exhibition was being received so far, and Yara Maura Silva, Mauricio's sister, enthused: "[The exhibition] continues to be a success with both the public and the critics. Mauricio de Sousa is very pleased with the results and plans to take the collection to all countries interested in exhibiting it."

Humanoids Exposed!

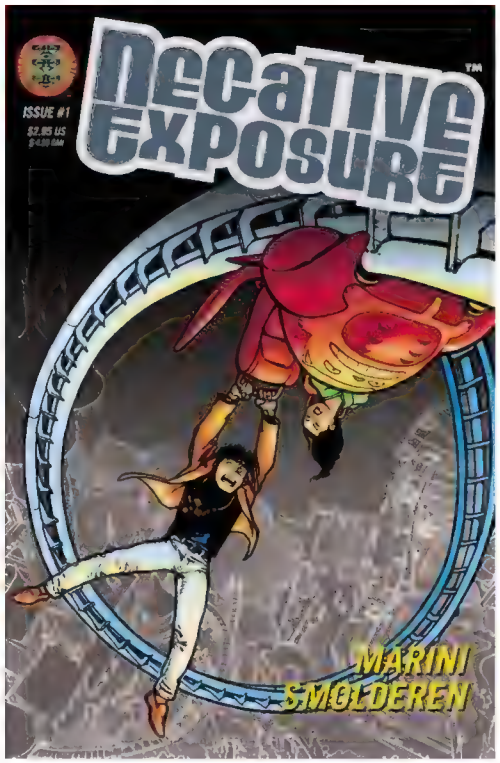
ON November 7th, Humanoids Publishing will publish the first issue of **Negative Exposure**, a six issue miniseries by writer Thierry Smolderen and artist Enrico Marini, best known for his work on **Raptor** and **Gypsy - Black Eyes**.

Retailers who are part of Diamond's overship programme will be receiving extra copies of the first issue, to make sure that they do not order too conservatively and miss potential sales. Humanoids titles, such as **Metabarons**, sometimes take time to build an audience, and maintaining a presence on the comic shop shelves would seem to be the way to hook floating readers into the globe-trotting misadventures of photojournalist hero Oliver Varese.

Humanoids Marketing Manager Ian Sattler explained: "We saw the success that we had overshipping **The Incal** #1, and thought that we should apply the same plan to **Negative Exposure**. With **The Metabarons**, it took some time for that book to find its audience, but it definitely did. By overshipping **Negative Exposure**, we put as many copies as possible out there for fans to see and sample. At the same time, we show retailers how we stand behind this comic and the large following it is sure to gather."

Under the overship programme, retailers will receive a minimum of three extra copies of Negative Exposure, even those who did not order the book. Stores that ordered 16 or more copies will receive 25% over and above their original orders.

Borderline asked Ian Sattler what it was that would make **Negative Exposure** stand out on the comics racks: "Humanoids wanted to publish **Negative Exposure** because of all the different styles and influences that are present in the book. You've got Manga-style art, European layouts, and American action. Humanoids wants to be a universal publisher and put out books which fans all over the world can appreciate. **Negative Exposure** is a great step towards that goal. It's a very fun and exciting book, while at the same time dealing with real world issues. I've never really seen anything like it in comics, and I will bet that most of our readers haven't either. We are very proud to produce this miniseries, especially at a time when readers are becoming more aware of Marini's art after his much deserved success on **Raptor**."



Negative Exposure is 32 pages in full color, retailing for $2.95.

Dreddcon 2001

NOTTINGHAM'S Galleries of Justice was the appropriate venue for the second annual **2000AD** convention, DreddCon:2, held on September 29. The event served as the launchpad for Dredd:The Law, an exhibition of all things Judge Dredd related, from classic covers to the Judge Dredd pinball machine. The exhibition costs £6 to enter, but for the price visitors are also entitled to the full tour of the Galleries of Justice.

For the second year running, Guest Of Honour Carlos Ezquerra was forced to cancel at the last moment, but his fellow Guest of Honour, John Wagner, was in attendance.

Borderline spoke to organizer Kev F. Sutherland about how he thought the convention went down: "I enjoyed DreddCon:2 immensely and heard nothing but praise and thanks. The fans seemed particularly to enjoy the access they got to the creators. Unlike Comics 2000, which has been packed to over-flowing with long queues and a spread out venue, DreddCon:2 at the Galleries of Justice had an intimate mix of dedicated punters and generous guests. John Wagner signed and chatted for well over his allotted time, entirely under his own initiative, and Greg Staples and Matt Brooker's masterclasses were well attended and greatly appreciated."

As with the previous DreddCon, the highlight of the event was Tharg's Pitchfest, where attendees were invited to submit their ideas and characters to a panel of 2000AD's creators and editors in front of an audience, for entertainment value and for the chance to write for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. Apart from the poor acoustics, using the law courts as the venue for the pitchfest proved extremely atmospheric. Story ideas were pitched, and commented upon by the jury, and finally voted upon by the audience at the end of the session. The scores on the doors deemed Andrew Lewis, editor of the new 2000AD fanzine **Zarjaz**, the overall winner, with Borderline's own Tom Lennon the runner-up. Expect to see those names in **2000AD** before too long.

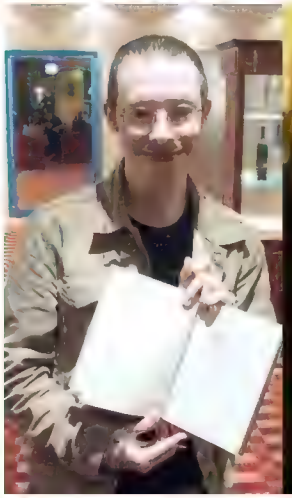
Borderline asked other creators for their comments on the event. Dredd's creator John Wagner told us: "On the minus side there was a lack of things for visitors to do, but this is a problem I have with every comic convention I've attended. On a more positive note, although some people had a problem with the venue- too bitty- the former courtroom was an excellent setting for the panels. Dredd-wise, very appropriate. I also like the way Rebellion are taking their cons around the country. It gives everyone a chance to attend without having to travel a million miles to get there."

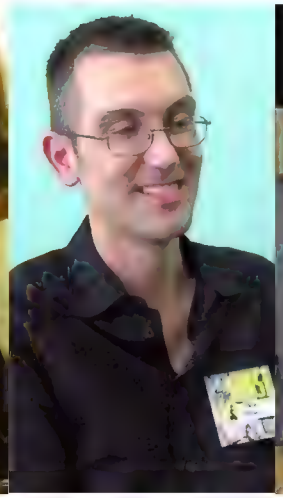
Steve (*Zenith*) Yeowell's personal highlights were: "Kev Sutherland as the Voice of Dredd in the Judge Dredd exhibition; the venue for the panels, mine being the "Classic Droids" panel during which I got to tell my "Duncan Fegredo and the builder" story; posing for photos with a toy monkey on my shoulder; Pete Doherty's Barbie sketch, and people still wanting sketches from me!"

Yeowell continued: "I didn't get to the first DreddCon so I haven't anything to compare this year's against other than the obviously much more general Comics 2001. The morning seemed pretty quiet but numbers had picked up by lunchtime and it looked to me as though all rooms were busy for the rest of the day. Personally, I would have liked a larger dealers room. Liked the Dredd exhibition."

2000AD artist and Pitchfest Chief Judge Frazer Irving shared some of his own thoughts about the event: "Basically, Nottingham was full of large groups of what looked like single and man-hungry girls. This as a backdrop for a comic con was a novelty on its own. Hurrah! The exhibition was nice, with displays that made comic art look like 'real' art for once. It was nice to meet some of the industry guys I keep bumping into, as well: Steve Yeowell, John Charles, Colin Macneil (and his delightful missus Karen) are always the ones I end up chatting to at these things, and it's good to get this community going. At least now they know me by name. It was also fun to chat to the man Wagner about this *Judge Death* strip we're working on. I always enjoy chatting to collaborators as it improves every project I work on. The venue was nice, though the panels were a bit strained due to the odd acoustics of the place." Asked for his highlights, Irving answered: "Finally meeting Gordon Rennie after all these months chatting to him via the phone. Now I know what he looks like, he shall appear in a strip *whether he wants to or not*. Also meeting some of the fans, especially the kids who had a mischievous smirk when they asked me to sign my *Nikolai Dante* cover for Prog 1259 [where the hero is gesturing with an upraised middle finger]. Will I go to another one? Let's face it, aside from the contact with the fans, which is always rewarding, these events are the few times when we creative types (and the editors) get together to talk about shite and stuff. It's fun, and I intend to make them a regular event on my calendar."

Borderline charged D'Israeli (Matt Brooker) with the task of providing us with a photographic taster of DreddCon for our readers. BL





Frazer Irving, Steve Pugh, Steve Yeowell, Kev F, Colin MacNeil, D'Israeli (the photographer), Dreddcon display.

THE DEVIL HE WILL

The Mike Carey Interview

*WHEN the DC Vertigo book **Lucifer** was nominated for five Eisner awards this year, many people were caught by surprise. Who is Mike Carey? How did this book get to issue 18 without people noticing? **Lucifer** sells around 15,000 copies each month, with the trade paperback collections which will boost its audience only now beginning to be published. The central character is based on the demon introduced in Neil Gaiman's **Sandman**, and **Lucifer** (and Vertigo) has frequently been accused of strip-mining that series. However, Mike Carey has written something with more than the same old adaptations of mythologies, with more than post-modern versions of old DC characters, and with more than just "what Sandman did next". Carey's work is so valued by Vertigo that he has both a 48 page **Lucifer** special and a hardcover original graphic novel linking with the **Lucifer** series coming soon.*

*Here he talks to **Borderline**'s Adrian Brown about his career and his plans for more projects for US and UK comics and television. And he answers questions about his work for the Dark Lord - Ozzy Osbourne.*

***Borderline:** What is Lucifer about ?*

Mike Carey: Oh great! Start with an easy one. Okay, it's about the funky adventures of a Merlot-swigging Devil who lives in Hollywood with his demon girlfriend and runs a trendy diner for A-list celebs.

No, I guess it's about some pretty intangible things. Will, and pride, and where they take you. It's a psychological study of an extreme and unusual personality. When I did the *On the Ledge* blurb just before issue one came out I said that it was a thought experiment, like Schrodinger's cat, and I still think that's a good analogy. I know people who have some of the ruthless focus of Lucifer, even though I myself am a practising marshmallow. And I know people who are getting on towards being that narcissistic, too. I think it's fascinating to look at those aspects of human personality and ask the question "well, how far could you take this?".

So as with most devils, I guess, the Lucifer I try to draw is us. In Orwell's words, "an expression on the human face."

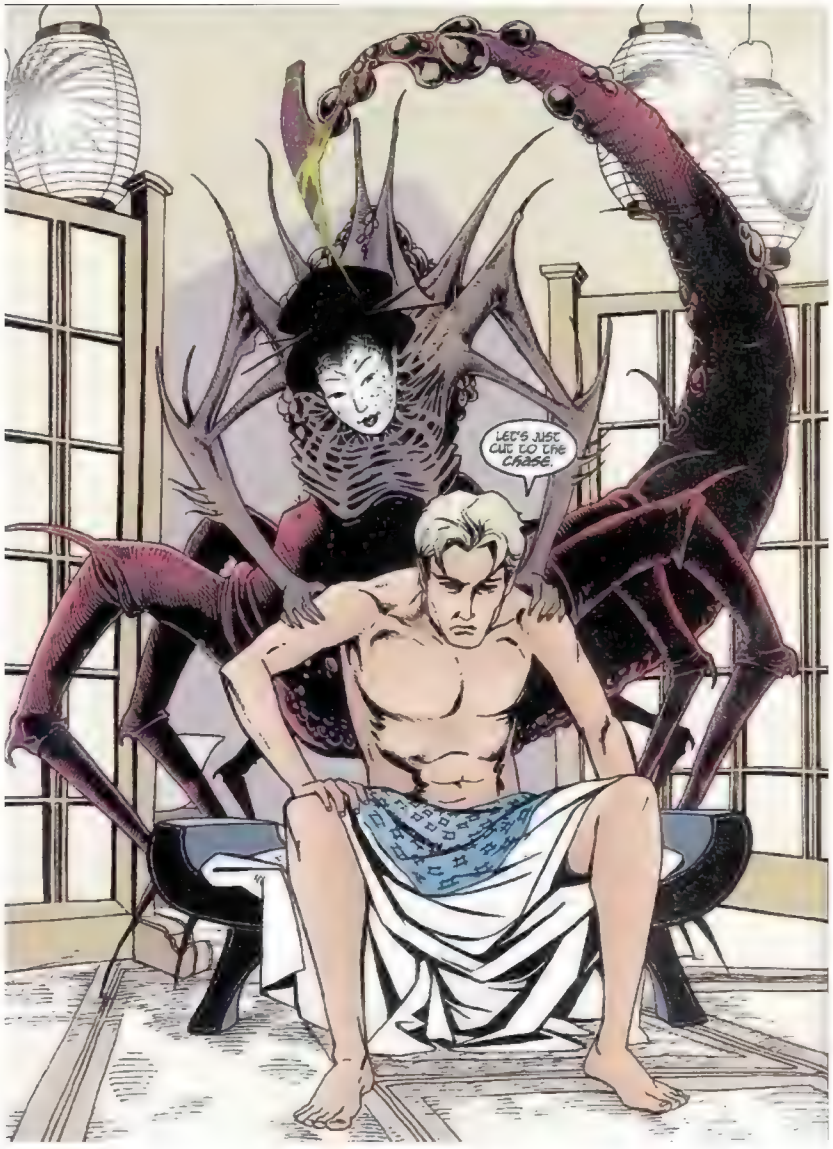
***BL:** I've read that you don't have a finite series in mind for Lucifer, but is there a definite tale that you want to tell ?*

MC: It's probably closer to the truth to say that I've got tales, plural, that I want to tell. The original pitch that I sent to Karen (Berger, Vertigo's Executive Editor) took the story through to the end of *Children and Monsters* in a lot of detail, and then sketched in further developments which will probably take us all the way to about issue 30. After that there are still things that have to happen and situations that have to arise, but I haven't worked out clearly in my mind how and when they will arise.

But what I'm finding now is that every story I write throws up other potential stories. The three-parter that we start in #21 gave us a situation that I just had to stop and define and exploit in #24.

It's going to be a branching narrative, not a linear one, despite the strong logical sequence that I hope has come through in the stories so far.

***BL:** As a series, **Lucifer** seems to*



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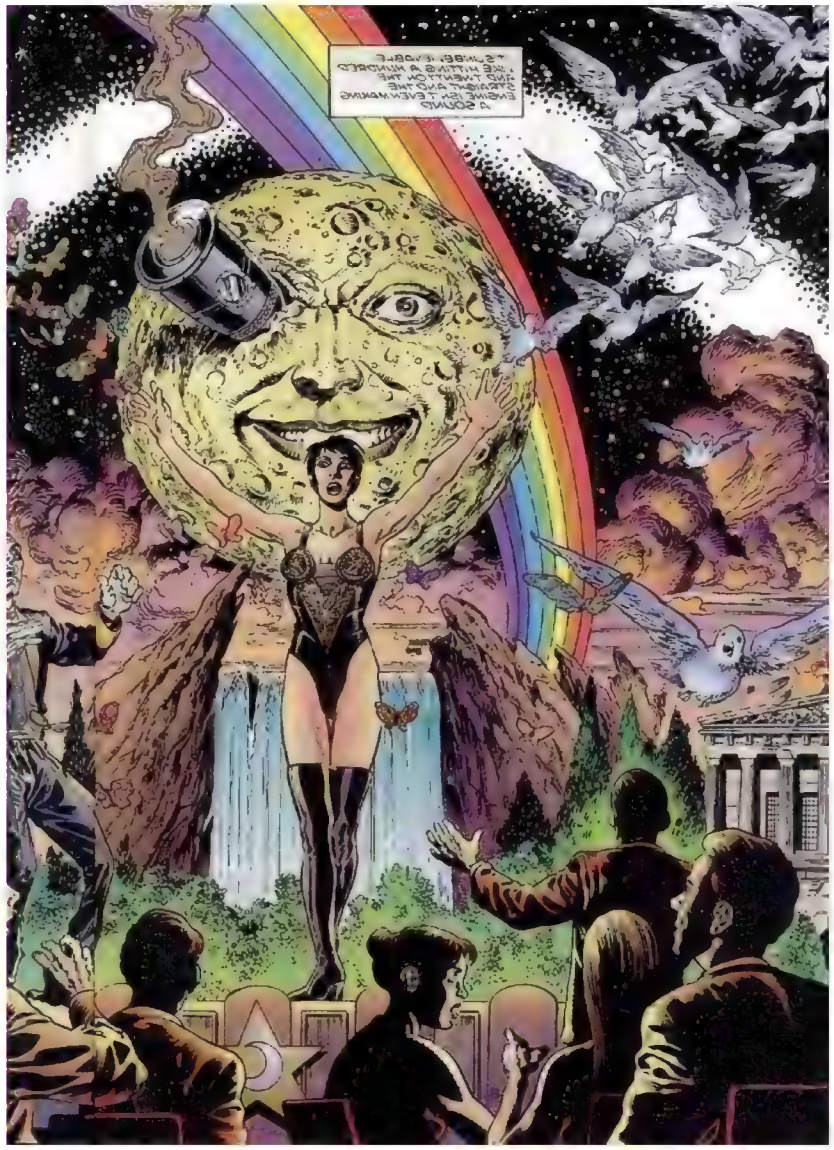
*contain several different genres of story: the political comedy of manners in the various versions of Hell, the relationships between Lucifer's immediate surrounding cast and the dark - dare I say - **Hellblazer**-ish goings-on on Earth. Do you have influences in mind for these genres?*



MC: Yes. But don't ask me what they are. Obviously I'm writing in the tradition of earlier Vertigo books – the Delano run on **Hellblazer**, **Sandman** obviously, and before that Alan Moore's **Swamp Thing**. Okay, that wasn't a Vertigo book, but still.

Beyond that, I think it's all the stuff that's still in my head from my English Lit studies. I did an English degree at Oxford, then went on to do a doctorate (unfinished) at King's College London, so that was six years of soaking in literary texts and literary criticism. The period pieces I've done - Petrefax and Dalliance With the Damned, for example - draw enormously on Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne and Ben Jonson and Christ knows what else. And the one-offs are influenced in their tone and structure by prose short stories written by people like Borges, Ursula LeGuin, Donald Barthelme. I know that's a pretty diverse grab-bag, but I've got a very messy mind.

And way too much spare time, obviously.

***BL:** You've noted that **The Dreaming** had to follow immediately in the footsteps of **Sandman**, whereas **Lucifer** had time between. However, I feel that **Lucifer** follows the story structure of **Sandman** rather than feeding on the cast of characters. You have longer arcs punctuated by single issues. Is that a deliberate decision? Do you think that's how monthly comics work best?*

MC: It is a deliberate decision, yes - and a conscious, cold-blooded imitation of the way Neil told stories in **The Sandman**. Because, quite, frankly, I've never seen a comic series tell stories more powerfully and more effectively than **The Sandman** did. I thought long and hard about what made it work so well - I mean, apart from Neil's skill and imagination as a writer - and I came to the conclusion that both the pacing and the handling of the central character were vital. You needed a protagonist who you could put anywhere in the frame – i.e., either dead centre or right at the edge and barely visible - and still get narrative mileage out of. And you needed to be able to play with the shape and size of the stories you were telling without being tied down by any kind of pre-established formula or set of expectations.

Neil's Morpheus is the lord of a realm, the Dreaming, and through this he touches every aspect of human life and every era of history. So you've got infinite settings and infinite tones, potentially. Lucifer is like that too: he's not the lord of a realm any more, but like Dream (if less formally) he embodies certain universal aspects of human personality in a pure, unadulterated form. This makes him a good touchstone for other characters and a good catalyst for stories, in which he may not himself be either interested or directly involved.

The one-offs, specifically, were something that Neil made his own. He set the benchmark for self-contained short stories in graphic form, and I wanted to have stories in that mould because through reading his I saw their power and the unique pleasure they could give as narratives. I think it's harder to do a good one-off than it is to do a good arc story, but when it works it has a concentrated emotional kick that's all its own.

***BL:** You've also tapped the vein of religious mythology that Neil Gaiman often referenced in **Sandman**; where does your interest in that mythology stem from?*

MC: Well, I did Latin and Greek A level at school, so I was immersed pretty deeply in mythology at that stage. But I think the interest started when I was much younger than that - when I was in primary school, in fact. I was always hooked on fantasy of every kind; I was mainlining Enid Blyton at age six, for example, all the Faraway Tree and Wishing Chair stories. And myths were fantasy as far as I was concerned. I got the same pleasure out of reading some kiddie digest of Greek myths that I did out of reading **The Faraway Tree** or **Tales of Brave Adventure** (Blyton's retelling of the Arthurian legend).

Then when I got older I realised the difference - which is that myths have a much greater emotional resonance. People relate to myths on a very fundamental level, so stories that are based on or draw on myths can really get you going even if they're not well told. And in the hands of a great writer, like Neil Gaiman or Alan Moore or Tad Williams or whoever, it's like they add three storeys and seven sub-basements to whatever narrative framework is being built.

***BL:** There are some very rich and intriguing new characters - The Basanos, Jill Presto, Elaine Belloc - and is Amenadiel new? It's hard to tell with so many versions of Hell in the DCU! Who is your favourite to work with? Are any of them based on specific people or characters?*

MC: Amenadiel is new, yeah. I got the name, and the fact that he's one of the Thrones, from a demonography text that I use a lot - Fred Gettings' **Dictionary of Demons**. I liked the idea of a heavenly field agent with a ruthless

WHERE ARE WE?
HMM?
OH, YOU'RE INSIDE HIS MIND THE TEACHER'S. THE MAN YOU'RE IN THE PROCESS OF MURDERING.
OXYGEN STARVATION SQUEEZES THE DRUG HIGH INTO SYNAESTHETIC SCREAMS. IT FEELS EVEN WORSE THAN IT LOOKS.
It just sort of came to me then. Even though he didn't have any HORNS or anything.
YOU'RE... YOU'RE HIM. THE DEVIL.
I SUMMONED THE DEVIL.
DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF, CHILD. I'M NOT HERE BECAUSE YOU CALLED ME.
BUT I DID HEAR YOUR VOICE, AND I WANTED TO SEE FOR MYSELF.
SOMEONE HAS BEEN WORKING FOR A VERY LONG TIME. CHANCE ALONE COULDN'T ACCOUNT FOR YOU.

and world-weary cast of mind and a personal grudge against the maverick Lucifer.

But I think my favorite character to work with, out of the ones that I've created myself, is Elaine. I love her very direct and honest and candid child's point of view on everything - the strength and the naivety of her responses. She is sort of based on my own daughter, Louise, although she's a little older than Louise and she's reached a different point in her life. Issue 21 has her fretting about why she's not developing breasts at the same rate as her friends.

In issue 4, *Born with the Dead*, I tried really hard to get the right voice for Elaine; for a twelve-year old girl in my own part of North London, going through hell and puberty at the same time. I didn't entirely succeed, but I got close enough that I was pleased with the results and wanted to try again. And now I guess I'm sort of hooked on her. Chris Moeller's cover for issue 21 gives you the perfect Elaine - as she is now. A bit older than when we first saw her, a bit cockier and more sure of herself, but still painfully serious about everything and with the weight of the world on her shoulders. It is such a beautiful image.

BL: *Some readers have commented on the different styles of Dean Ormston and Peter Gross, one more expressive, one more cartoon-realistic. Would you use their styles to suit different stories?*

MC: I would now, yes. That's something I was slow to cotton on to, but I am at last tailoring story and approach to suit the style of the artist more. It was through working with Peter that I first started doing this: the very first pencils he turned in for *The House of Windowless Rooms* showed me that there wouldn't be any setting so fantastic, so ambitious or so complicated that he couldn't handle it. So I took off the gloves. That sounds frivolous, but I do believe that one of the key strengths he brings to the book is that ability to take us to any place I describe and make us see it and believe in it. He's the fantasy artist par excellence.

And Dean's strength is in the evocation of mood: there's a darker and rawer edge to his work, an edge of horror for want of a better word, that I consciously played to in Erishad's story (issue 9) and in *The Thunder Sermon* (issue 20).

BL: *Lucifer seems comfortably in the mid-table of Vertigo sales, does that mean that tpbs are more likely? Are you writing the stories with tpb collections in mind?*

MC: DC seems to be supporting the book very strongly from that point of view, with the second collection due out in December. I can honestly say that I don't have an eye to the collections when I'm writing the stories - there are enough constraints without inventing new ones - but I felt great when *Devil in the Gateway* came out. I love it that I'm in book form after all these years. Now the trick is staying in print...

BL: *Are you aware of the tpbs bringing in new readers who would not pick up the monthly comic? Does the collected version add credibility outside of the comics community?*

MC: I don't know about outside the comics community, but I spoke to loads of people in Bristol who hadn't read a single issue until they picked up the trade. I think what happens is that if a book gets good word of mouth, people will pick up a collection out of curiosity and give it a try - it's less of an investment in time and money than chasing the back issues. And there are also some readers now who've more or less given up on buying comics on a month-by-month basis, and do most of their reading by picking up the stuff that goes into tpb. It's cheaper, and there's been a sort of winnowing process because stuff that didn't do well in the first place won't be collected.

I sort of feel like I'm walking taller since the tpb came out. It's something solid that's there, and continues to be there. When I see it in bookshops I want to point to it and say "I wrote that." But that would make me look like a nerd, of course, so I don't.

BL: *It may have been disappointing not to win the several awards you were nominated for at the Eisners, but it's a great recognition for such a relatively new book and writer on the scene. How do you feel about the nominations ?*

MC: I was absolutely over the moon when I heard. I got an email from Karon Flage of Sequential Tart saying "Congratulations. If you don't know why, ask Shelly. Or check the news sites." So I checked into CBR and saw the Eisner listings. It was just unbelievable: basically, every category where we could get a mention, we did.

I was a bit gutted on the night when we didn't get any actual awards, but that was a momentary reaction. Like you say, given that this time last year nobody knew me from Adam it was an incredible accolade to get so many nominations.

BL: *If I can sum up the differences between **Sandman** and **Lucifer**, it is that Neil Gaiman did a Duran Duran biography whereas you did one on Ozzy Osbourne. Who were the hardest characters to deal with, the hordes of Hell or Ozzy's people?*

MC: Ozzy's people were actually amazingly on the ball. He has a very professional PR machine, as you'd guess, and they were quite determined that I wouldn't get any of my facts wrong. They put me in touch with an Irish guy who's Ozzy's number one fan, and he lent me about eight scrapbooks full of Ozzy articles and memorabilia. Plus they sent me the *Don't Blame Me* documentary, checked my draft outline and so on. I didn't get to speak to Sharon Arden, but I understand she was directly involved in overseeing the project, or at least defining its parameters.

But they didn't hassle me or tell me what I could and couldn't say. They

just gave me the resources and let me get on with it. By contrast, when I did the Pantera book, I got the distinct impression that nobody within a million miles of the band, their manager, their label or even their fans knew that we even existed.

And about six months after the Ozzy comic came out they sent me, out of the blue, a copy of the book signed in gold pen by Ozzy himself, with a compliments slip. I thought that was a nice gesture.

***BL:** Can you give some brief idea of the recent and forthcoming projects you have worked on: such as when they are due, what stage they are at, what stories you are telling?*

MC: Well the two big projects that I've got in the pipeline for DC are **Nirvana** and **The Furies**.

Nirvana is a 48-page **Lucifer** special with painted art by Jon J Muth. The script has been through three drafts, the second of which was a major rewrite, and Shelly and I are both very, very pleased with the outcome. J has done some great page roughs already, and a cover design that's just amazing - a portrait shot of Lucifer with some of the elements from the story juxtaposed in a very arresting and powerful way. The planned publication date is early next summer. I can't wait.

The Furies is a hardcover graphic novel under the *Sandman Presents* umbrella, again with painted art - this time from John Bolton. I feel really good about this, too - partly because working with John is such a kick for an old **Warrior** fan like me, and partly because it was such a unique project to be involved in. It tells the story of what happens to Lyta Hall after the events of *The Kindly Ones* and *The Wake*, so in a sense it's taking the core story of **The Sandman** forward. It has Dream as a character - not throughout but in the climactic scenes - and it allows Lyta to speak to her son again, or at least to the being he's become. To be allowed to paint on that particular canvas was a very big thing for me.

I've done some work for **2000AD**, too. A series called *Carver Hale*, which appeared last spring, and another called **13**, which I'm writing at the moment. I have mixed feelings about *Carver Hale*, to be honest. I think the central concept is a strong one, and I loved the way Mike Perkins drew the character, but somehow when I looked at the finished thing it wasn't as strong as it was in my mind. It got mixed responses from readers - some liked the "*Lock Stock* meets *Hellraiser*" sort of ambience. Others found it unsatisfying. One guy writing on the alt.comics.2000AD board said that the problem was that the climaxes were conceived in a way that didn't work visually. There may be some truth in that.

13 will be better, if only because I'm getting more skilled in telling stories in five-page chunks. There's perhaps more of a structure to the story, and a more interesting relationship between the central characters. It's straightforward big-concept sci-fi, of the sort that **2000AD** does best. And Andy Clarke is producing some superb images for it.

Beyond that, I've got a cartoon series coming out on European TV next year, called *Meadowlands*, which I co-created along with my wife Lin. That's a sort of fantasy, fairy-tale take on the Romeo and Juliet story. And there's a very strange CGI series coming out in the UK very shortly called *Spheriks*, for which I wrote ten episodes. The main characters are the mascots for the 2002 World Cup, and each episode revolves around a futuristic version of football, with the teams consisting of cute little animated characters. Mel and Sue are among the voices for this, as is Brian Pringle, and the League of Gentlemen. They were hoping to get Ant and Dec at one stage, but they didn't manage.

***BL:** What other future work can we expect from you?*

MC: I'm trying to pitch a creator-owned mini to Vertigo, which I'm hoping Shelly Bond will edit - because we have a really good working relationship, and she's one of the best editors in the business. I'm doing development work on a horror series for Tailormade Films. And I'm writing a novel. I hope. If my agent can get someone to commission it.

***BL:** Do you have any plans to do any superhero work?*

MC: I wouldn't rule out superhero work; it would be fun to try. But I haven't been offered any and I'm not chasing any.

***BL:** Without reference to your DC comps box, are there any comics that you look forward to reading? If so, what is good about them?*

MC: Does that mean that I can't mention DC titles at all? That's kind of tough, because they are what I mostly read. Well, I enjoyed **Marvel Boy** and I'm enjoying **Fantastic Four 1234**: I like most anything that Grant Morrison writes, because he can take the most hackneyed characters, situations or ideas and make you see something fresh and exciting in them. I'm loving Garth Ennis's Dredd series, currently running in **2000AD**: it's called *Helter Skelter*, and it's huge and scary and funny and classic Dredd. I got Joe Sacco's **Safe Area Gorazde** while I was in San Diego – that's a magnificent book and a masterpiece of the comics form. And outside of that I'm going to have to throw up my hands and admit that the comp box has made me lazy and fat and stodgy. Sorry.

***BL:** Finally, isn't there something odd about the AOL/Warner multinational* owning ***Lucifer**?*

MC: Nope. That fits into my world view without any straining at all.

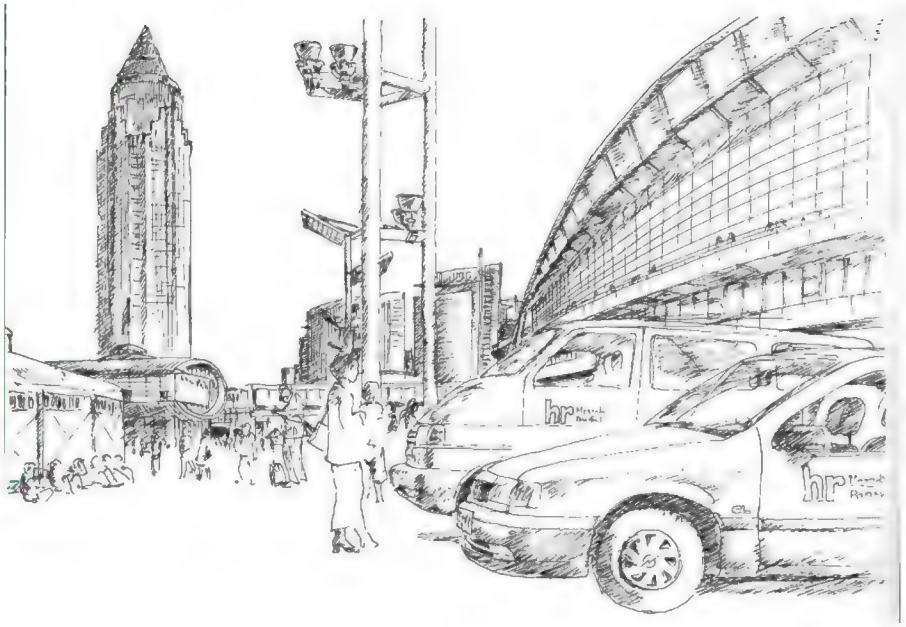
BL

COMICS FESTIVALS IN GERMANY

Berlin Comics festival & Frankfurt Book Fair, September/October 2001

THE really important comics convention in Germany has taken place every other year since 1984 in a little town called Erlangen, (the next one is due in June 2002). Larger towns have tried to fill this biennial gap, but only with mixed success. Half-heartedly organized events in Frankfurt and Hamburg in the past were disastrous. Hamburg at least can boast of a few impressive exhibitions during the '90s, organized by dozens of young artists themselves, but as far as proper festivals go, Erlangen remains unchallenged.

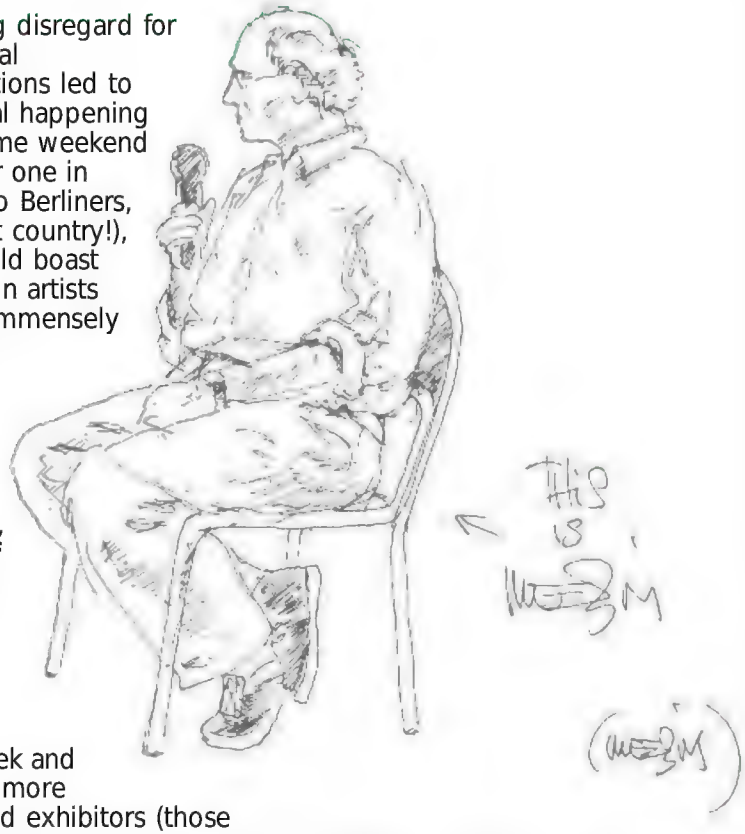
There are a few large comic marts, in Cologne, Hamburg, etc., but these are commercial affairs, just stalls of comics dealers with no artists present, no exhibitions, no programmes. Such things need subsidies and enthusiastic, committed organizers, with the right mixture of artistic aspirations and commercial know-how. Erlangen works, because, like its direct inspiration Angoulême (the world's largest comics festival, held annually in South-west France since 1972), it is the only major cultural event happening in a town that is small but not too small to harbour artistic ambitions.



Berlin

Accepting comics as part of cultural life is also what motivated the recent festivals in Berlin and Frankfurt. Two years ago, the lively alternative comics scene of Berlin initiated an annual one-day market, with most publishers and many artists attending, named Der Comic Garten (because it was situated in a huge garden-restaurant). The emphasis on alternative and arty comics is probably what caught the eye of the "New Society for Literature", which organizes literary festivals, paid for by the city of Berlin. Here was another committed and professional organization capable of presenting comics to the public.

The underlying theme this year was "Are Comics Literature?", which led to interesting talks and discussions with distinguished speakers (for instance Thierry Groensteen, former director of the CNBDI at Angoulême) and various comics stars. Although there were presentations and films about manga and Disney, and various mainstream publishers among the stalls, by and large the emphasis was on alternative comics. A perplexing disregard for commercial considerations led to the festival happening on the same weekend as another one in Munich (to Berliners, a different country!), which could boast two foreign artists who are immensely popular in Germany: Jeff Smith (**Bone**) and Hermann (**Jeremiah**, **Towers of Bois-Maury**). It would have made sense to wait a week and get many more visitors and exhibitors (those in Munich) plus those two stars.



But a town like Berlin may lack the impetus for a large, populist comics festival.

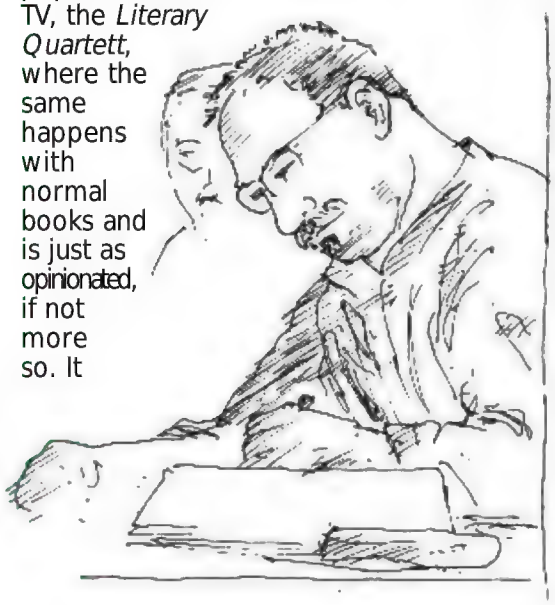
Berlin's culture is above that sort of thing; a small but refined comics convention seems to have more weight than a riotous populist spectacular with thousands of visitors. On the other hand, this small scale, elitist point of view made for a thoroughly enjoyable festival.

Frankfurt

Speaking of big numbers, the Frankfurt Book Fair - the oldest book market in the world - obviously doesn't need to worry about attracting publishers, what with over 8,000 of them (that's right!) attending. It's mindboggling. Unfortunately, these are not all comics publishers. I'm told that about 350 do have comics material of one kind or another among their titles, but only 55 were sufficiently comics-orientated to group together in Hall 3.0, which included a special comics section with podium, exhibition and library (armchairs and bookshelves to browse).

The Book Fair's special comics-related event, called 'Schwerpunkt' (focal point), has been planned for three consecutive years - last year, this and the next. So if you ever

want to check out the largest book fair anywhere, and happen to be interested in comics, next year may be a good time to visit! I attended many of the discussions/talks, but also spent a lot of time whizzing past virtually every stall, becoming inundated with visual impressions (and weighted down with dozens of catalogues, about comics, art and children's books, plus free newspapers and their special book sections). The comics panels without a very clear focus (and several speakers) were a bit hazy, but some really caught my interest. For instance, the so-called Comic-quartett, where four critics discussed four titles published in German, generally managed to be entertainingly controversial and opinionated, for instance by belittling rather good comics, such as **From Hell**, **Dylan Dog** and **Nausicäa**. The format is based on the most popular arts show on German TV, the *Literary Quartett*, where the same happens with normal books and is just as opinionated, if not more so. It works, and would be a good model to use at French or English-speaking festivals...



Especially interesting and informative was a lecture given in English by Mile High Comics' entrepreneur Chuck Rozanski: "What happened to the Comic Books?". Also in English was an interview with Moebius, who afterwards signed books with little sketches. I managed to get both a sketch and his signature on a drawing I had made of him during the interview. (That was my main activity, besides running round like a maniac - making sketch after sketch.) By far the most fascinating comics event planned was not to be: a discussion between Moebius and Art Spiegelman, which was canceled thanks to the vicious attack on New York, very close to where Spiegelman lives with his family. Because of the war, a good number of Americans and many Japanese publishers and visitors didn't attend, and security was pretty tight, especially in Hall 8 (the English language section).

But there was a very good talk on Spiegelman by one of the critics involved in the Comic-quartett, Andreas Platthaus, who also took part in a very funny, would-be serious lecture on Carl Barks's Duck Universe. Barks is an absolute cult in Germany, with a society called "Donaldisten" chewing the fat about their subject, "Donaldismus" (Donaldism). One of the questions discussed was "Where is Duckburg?", with no clear answers arrived at. (Actually, it's part of the L.A. suburbs, except in stories that require snow!)

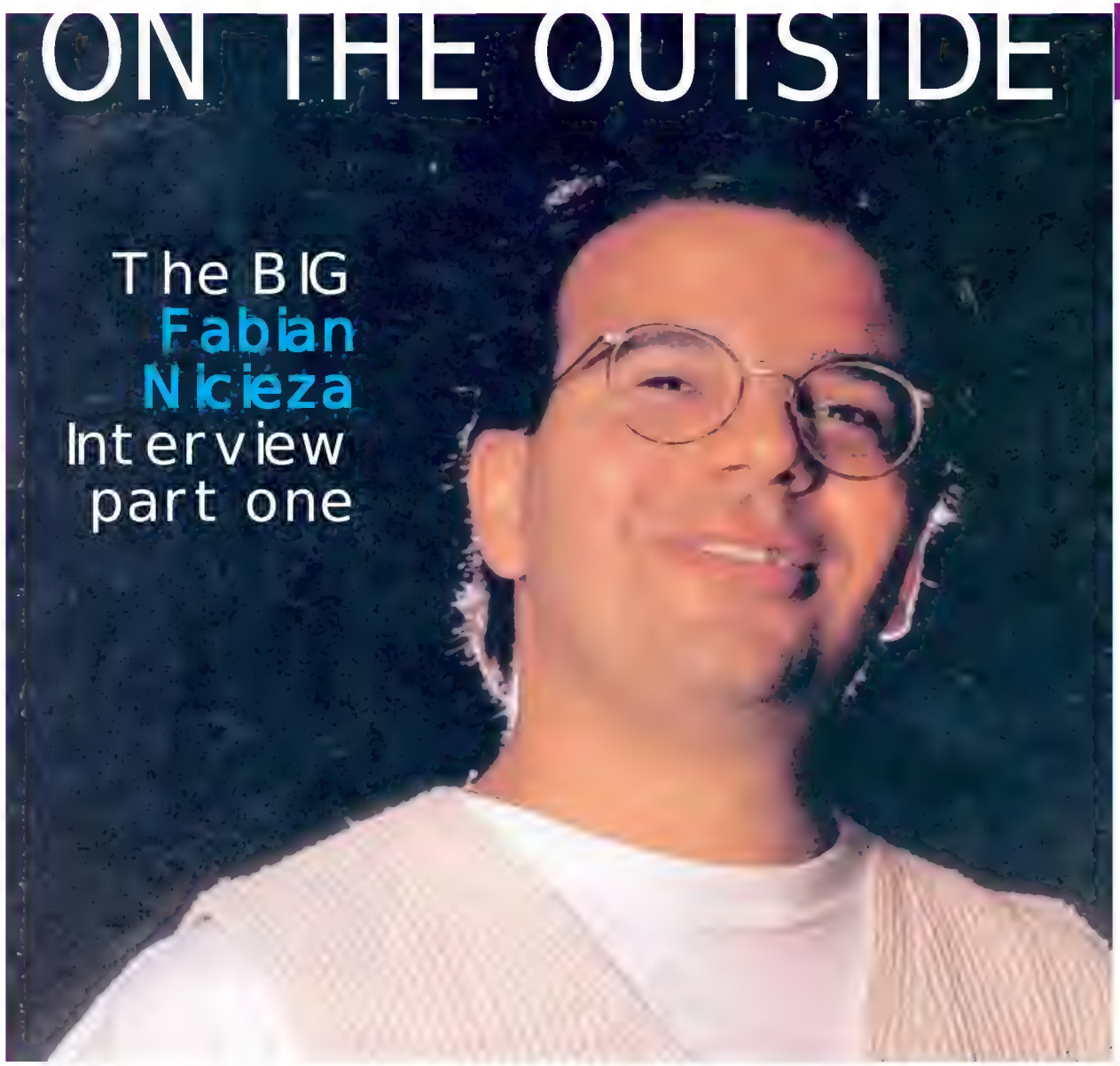
Platthaus is a critic for the illustrious *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the most respected German daily. Their remarkably open-minded and intelligent articles about comics may be one of the reasons why the Book Fair organizers saw fit to support comics with a special event like this. Since September this year the *FAZ* Sunday edition has started to run a whole page comic series at the back of their arts-section, drawn by the Italian artist Lorenzo Mattotti as a direct homage to the US Sunday pages of the 1930s and 40s. It's a large broadsheet paper, so these huge pages are a joy to behold. Mattotti was also present at the Book Fair, but hadn't been officially announced, so that a signing session of his only attracted a handful of customers queuing for elaborate, colourful sketches. I, like others, asked for a drawing on a separate sheet, not inside the album I'd bought from him. It seems that at proper comics festivals in France, etc, this would be unthinkable with a famous artist like him... Sometimes it really pays to search out the smaller festivals, especially one like this in connection with such a fantastic event as the Book Fair.

Andy (text and sketches)

Photographs of the Frankfurt comics event can be seen at http://www.comic.de/buchmesse/fotogalerie/galerie1.html and subsequent pages, and details of the programme and links (in English) are at http://www.comic.de/buchmesse/index.html

BL

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN



*ABOUT nine years ago, Phil Hall entered into a flame war with former Valiant editor, former **X-Men** writer and current **Thunderbolts** writer Fabian Nicieza on Usenet's X-book group. The thrust of the heated debate was Hall's belief that Nicieza was spoiling the X-books. Sensibly they took it off-list and soon became "e-friends". Now, nearly a decade later and after promising not to release the photographs, the two men who have never met in person got together via electronic media to hold The Definitive Nicieza Interview... This is the first part.....*

BL: Let's start at the beginning. You're originally from Argentina aren't you?
FN: Yup. Born in Buenos Aires as late in 1961 as a human being could just about possibly get. Minutes before the clock hit '62.

BL: So how did you find yourself in New York?
FN: Apparently, a cab then a plane, then a cab. I was young, so memory fails. It might also have involved rickshaws, wading through shallow muddy rivers and clandestine night-ops. Basically, my dad owned a factory that produced gorgeous bone china sculptures, but the factory didn't succeed. My parents felt that was a sign that he couldn't achieve his dreams in Argentina, so they decided to relocate to the U.S. of A. Typical, sunny, suburban immigrant story. Sacrificing then striving and succeeding to achieve the American Dream for their children, more so than for themselves. I didn't realize the sheer courage it took for them to do what they did until I was much older.

BL: You got into the comics industry, which isn't an easy thing to do. How did you get in?
FN: Applied for jobs at Marvel and DC in their promotions/sales departments. Failed to get the jobs I was interviewing for, since the positions were a bit out of my experience range. Worked for Berkley Publishing producing paperback books. Two years later, I heard through the incestuous publishing grapevine of a job opening at Marvel in the manufacturing department for children's books. Interviewed for a job and got it. And from there, history was made!

BL: What age?
FN: Uhm... math is tough. I started at Marvel in August of 1985, that would have made me 24, almost 25.

BL: But you'd been reading comics before then?
FN: Before I could even read! I was looking at Argentinian kids magazines that had comic material in them. I remember one specific one, **Antiojito y Antifas**. It was a larger format publication similar to today's **Nickelodeon Comics Magazine**.

When we came to the U.S., the first

A small, basic map of Argentina

Click on Globe returns to contents

Two faces of Fabian: a 1997 shot with facial hair and an earlier (1991?) fresh-faced shot. Left: Another map of Argentina.

recognisable images my brother and I saw here were comics featuring Superman and Batman, since at that time their 1940s serial and 1950s TV shows were running on Argentine TV. We started buying those comics in late '66 and they helped us learn how to read and write English. I read **Superman** and **Batman** pretty exclusively for a little less than a year until a classmate of my brother's told him, "You have to read *these* comics instead!" And of course, they were Marvel titles.

BL: These had an influence on you?
FN: Well, my favorite creators as a child were Stan Lee, John Romita, Jack Kirby and later, Jim Steranko, Roy Thomas and John Buscema. In the 70s it was Thomas and Barry Smith on **Conan**, Neal Adams, Jim Starlin, Steve Englehart, Dave Cockrum, Marshall Rogers, Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy.

Favorite comics, etc.? As a real little kid, **Spider-Man** and **Fantastic Four**. Then **Conan**, **Captain Marvel**, **Batman**, **Superman**, **Legion of Super-Heroes** and through it all, thick or thin, month in and month out, geek-alert sounds loud across the land, was **The Avengers**. Since our allowance would only stretch so far, and we had to buy other useless things besides comics, like baseball cards and candy, I wanted at least one comic a month that had *lots* of heroes in it. **Avengers** fit that bill. And being the geek that I am, it still does to this day.

*BL: **Psi-Force** was your first comics job. What are your memories of Marvel's New Universe?.*
FN: Well, obviously, I have *very* fond memories of the New Universe. I got a chance to develop my writing craft, get paid for it, make mistakes, take the kinds of chances I probably wouldn't have been able to take on a more mainstream title, etc. Worked with a group of great guys all rowing upstream together. All good.

BL: You were an editor on the line weren't you?
FN: No. I sold my first freelance job work in 1987. I'd had a staff job as Marvel's Advertising Manager in their promotion department since 1985. As a writer, I was first hired by Bob Budiansky to write a fill-in issue for the schedule-impaired **Psi-Force**. One fill-in became two became three in pretty quick succession. When I was offered the monthly gig, the four surviving New U titles - **Psi-Force**, **Starbrand**, **DP7** and **Justice** - had just been editorially consolidated under Howard Mackie. It was really Jim Shooter's decision to let me write it. Howard sort of had to accept this upstart snot-nose from the Promotions Department writing a book. Our relationship started out a bit rocky because of that, but then he came to appreciate my incredible talent, charm and modesty and we became great friends!

BL: That's a step up from advertising and promotions?
FN: Being an editor is a step up? I would have to say not quite. Being an editor was a far more aggravating and far less rewarding job than being the Advertising Manager. The pay at the time was no better. As Advertising Manager I got to deal with every department within the company in a wide variety of ways. I got to deal with industry publications, conventions, retail stores, creators, television, radio, newspapers - everybody inside and out of the business.

I only became an editor because I'd been the Advertising Manager for 4 years and had gotten burnt out on the enormous workload we had back then. Yes, Virginia, comic companies did used to advertise and promote their product! What a concept. I needed a change of pace and Tom (DeFalco) had already asked me to join the Editorial Department twice and I'd turned him down, so I figured I better finally accept the offer if I wanted to try something new. But really, if you gave me a choice right now between being a Muckity-Muck Editor or a Muckity-Muck in Sales/Promotion, I'd take the latter in a heartbeat.

BL: Does it annoy you, coming from advertising and promotions, that the industry isn't actually doing anything like the amount of promotion it needs to do to attract new readers?
FN: Doesn't annoy me, it disappoints me. I wholly understand that a marketing budget is a percentage of your projected operating budget. The smaller the operating budget or the operating revenue, the smaller the percentage for marketing. I think Marvel especially does an excellent job in "guerrilla marketing" with what little resources they have. In my day (cue old man music here), we had much larger staffs and a lot more money to play with. We could make *Atlantis Attacks* sponges for retailers and inflatable Spider-Man point-of-purchase displays (loads of fun on cold, lonely nights). The guys at Marvel now have a lot less toys to play with and they do the best they can with what they have. I can't speak for DC, since their internal operations as a whole have always been as inaccessible to me as the Freemasons.

BL: We all know why publishers don't spend a lot of promotional money, but would you agree that for all of the new spin given to comics by Joey and Bill, they still insist on putting the cart before the horse?
FN: Well, the "spin", as you put it, is not all that different than the hyperbole Stan Lee aggressively used in the 60s. It's the necessary by-product of having no money to more appropriately promote and market their product.

Bill and Joe talk a lot on the Internet because it's a surefire way of getting a defined percentage of their reader base to hear what they have to say. You may not always agree with everything they might say, or they might overstate their case once in a while, and they might certainly get their facts mixed up about "the old days" when trying to build a case for themselves, but that's just natural and necessary ego at play. They are both very smart guys and they know exactly what they have to do to continue pushing their company's product.

My only complaint comes when they try to push themselves and what they've accomplished (or are trying to accomplish) by belittling the work that came before. It is disingenuous of them to blame previous editorial regimes for "the 90s glut." Joe can be excused because he was a freelancer on the outside, not really privy to the day in, day out decision making that went on - or the pressures Tom DeFalco and (Publisher) Mike Hobson were under.

But Bill *especially* knows what a simplistic and inaccurate argument he sometimes makes. The glut *only* happened because of the incredible *greed* of the *owners* of the company, not the Publisher or the E-I-C who ran the program. We were being forced to overproduce every year to satiate their despicable greed at the expense of the industry as a whole. We knew it was happening while it was happening - and we knew what would happen as a result.

As a former President of Fleer, Bill should most certainly understand

what I'm saying, since to the best of my knowledge, he was quite actively involved in *creating* a similar glut for trading cards. When he took control of the trading card program away from Marvel's editorial department, Fleer's hyperactive overproduction to feed Perelman's pockets crushed what had been a very nice, slow-growing and *very* profitable program that might have continued to grow and prosper rather than flood and over-saturate the marketplace.

And admittedly, since I was on the outside looking into Fleer's operations, some of my perceptions might be inaccurate, but Bill would know better, of course. Other than that, I really do think they're kicking ass - and they do it in such an entertaining fashion, too!

BL: I wasn't aware that you had spent a year in comics limbo after the NewU. But I do remember you being touted as a future star at the time of ***New Warriors****. Wasn't this also the period when you started working on the X-books, scripting Liefeld's plots on* ***New Mutants****?*
FN: Actually, I wasn't in "comics limbo," I was in "freelance writing" limbo. I was working full time at Marvel and quite actively involved in the process of promoting/selling/advertising the company's comics each and every single weekday and a hell of a lot more weekends than I care to recall.

Don't equate the creative work done on the published product with the be-all and end-all of what needs to be done to produce that final product. A lot of behind the scenes work goes into it, too. I was part of a group that were doing innovative and exciting promotional, marketing and selling programs; we were informing and reciprocally educating the distributor and retailer base, we were mending lots of fences within divisions of the company by getting sales, promotion, editorial, licensing and international publishing to work more closely together than ever before. Honestly, from a staff work standpoint, '88 through '92 were the best years of my life (and I also think, in many ways, Marvel's, too).

As far as writing is concerned, I basically broke through the wall when I got **New Warriors**, but even more so when Danny (Fingeroth) offered me **Alpha Flight** as well. When I had two monthly team titles –-and especially **Alpha Flight** as much as **NW**, because we raised its sales bar pretty dramatically when we first took over - all of that got me noticed quite a bit within the halls of Marvel's editorial department.

By then, I'd pretty much gained the trust of the editorial group and the friendship of the people in charge like Tom, Gru (the late Mark Gruenwald) and Carl Potts. I was no longer the "outsider from sales." When I first started during the Shooter tenure, there had been a tremendous rift between sales/marketing and editorial - and I don't mean to imply that was solely Jim's fault, the people working and running sales had just as much to do with that rift in many ways.

I would like to think that I played a pretty important role - along with Lou Bank, Dale Kanzler, Kurt Busiek and Sven Larsen - to bridge the gap between departments and get everyone working more on the same page. Not only that, we worked very, very hard to get everyone drinking at the *same* bar. That certainly helped.

BL: That must have been a weird time, with all the impending changes and the removal of the old guard. How did you feel about those changes?
FN: If you mean when Jim Shooter's tenure ended, I was really on the outside looking in. I could obviously see the incredible – and I do mean incredible – amount of tension that existed within the editorial department, but I was in no position to comment on it, much less do anything about it.

When Jim left, it became a case of "put up or shut up" for the editorial department. They got what they'd wanted for years - now they could no longer use Jim as an excuse and they had to perform. I do believe, for the most part, that they absolutely did. Tom, Mark and Archie [Goodwin] working in unison really "righted the ship" and it sailed on the same successful course Shooter had set it on for quite a number of years, before Perelman's greed corrupted all that good work.

BL: You, Peter David and probably John Romita Jr were the people who really made names for yourselves from that failed Shooter experiment. Did you expect it to fail?
FN: Yes. At the time I certainly did, because although Jim Shooter had a very specific and very well-constructed philosophy for the books (as was evident by the quality of **Starbrand**), it was nearly impossible for other creators and editors to share that same vision or approach. It was like asking chefs who had spent all their lives making great Italian food to turn around and make great Chinese food. I do disagree with your contention about who "made a name" for themselves. Excellent artists like Ron Lim, Lee Weeks, Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira also worked on those titles.

BL: And did you expect to walk away from the New Universe with a reputation as a solid and dynamic new writer?
FN: Well, I was certainly hoping to, but it's not like I was flooded with offers after the New U folded. I think much of what I did in **Psi-Force** was pretty well regarded both by readers and the "insiders" - the editors who do the hiring. At the same time, after the New U books were all cancelled, I had about a year and a half of "scut work."

I basically had to scrounge around for any inventory stories, back-ups, etc. that I could get. I had to slowly earn my way back into the "editorial option list". It took a little while, but eventually, when Danny Fingeroth gave me **New Warriors**, I had worked my way back on to the editorial Rolodex.

BL: Why do you think it was that your ***New Warriors*** *was so well received, yet your run on the* ***X-Men*** *failed to win you any accolades?*
FN: For one very simple reason; the published work on **New Warriors** was far more indicative of my real creative efforts - and produced in a style far

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more suited to my writing strengths - than anything I ever did in the X-office was. I would say that for good or bad, the story and script in **New Warriors** was about 90% me, 10% Danny (and later Rob Tokar). (Of course, taking into account the close creative collaboration I had with Mark Bagley and Darick Robertson - I'm speaking solely from a plot and final lettered script standpoint.)

Conversely, the work for **X-Men** was maybe 30% mine, 70% not mine. I really don't want to come across as too much of a whiner, since it's water long under the bridge, but you did ask. I could have walked away far, far earlier than I chose to, but didn't, quite frankly because I knew I might never earn an equivalent income again for the rest of my life and I had to take my family's future into account over my own ego. Simply put though, the work I was credited for during my tenure on that title was not even remotely indicative of the work I really did or, especially, the work I had *wanted* to do.

*BL: I've always regarded **New Warriors** as being a Fabian project, despite the fact that DeFalco and Frenz invented the concept (like, yeah!). Was it a case of you getting a lot of editorial input from Tom, or was it a case of "here's some new toys, go and have fun"?*

FN: No, to Tom's credit, he *never* thrust himself into the creative process of the book. I tend to think, knowing Tom as well as I do and considering how close we were at the time, that he simply respected the work Danny, Mark and I were doing and, like any good manager, left well enough alone. He might not have agreed with all our creative choices - I certainly ignored certain character aspects of his series bible that I didn't feel comfortable with - but he never had a negative thing to say to us.

*BL: Do you find it quite ironic that you've been working with Mark Bagley again, on a title that has been likened to **New Warriors**, if only because of the creative team?*

FN: Well, it was absolutely wonderful to work with Mark again after so many years. I think we will *always* be a solid creative team because we communicate well, trust each other's strengths, etc. It was the stereotypical reunion, where we jumped right back into it after nearly 10 years without missing a beat.

*BL: You were lucky to work with artists of the calibre of Bagley and Darick Robertson on **New Warriors**. Do you think that book's downfall was similar to the fall of DC's **Justice League** franchise in the '90s - as soon as you lost the quality artists, the support for the title waned?*

FN: Well, I quit pretty soon after Darick did, so I can't say about the art affecting the "downfall." The title's gradual downfall was ensured after I left by the editorial process that gratuitously "linked" it to the **Spider-Man** titles, combined with the implicit knowledge that when Bob Harras became Editor in Chief, he was going to cancel the title no matter what it sold. He didn't like the book. Never had. I also don't think he ever read the book, but no matter. He thought - and had stated plenty of times in fun conversations we'd had - that it was a "DC-type book," whatever that meant to him. I found that ironic, since I (and many others on staff like Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio) found **New Warriors** to be *far* more of a "Marvel book" than anything Bob was producing in the X-office.

Well after I'd left, when Bob took over and he had to cull some books, I think then-editor Tom Brevoort knew he planned to axe **NW**. Mind you, I had left a full 2 years earlier. While I was still writing, sales had slowly dropped from #25 through #50 because of many factors. I feel the two most important reasons were market

conditions that had negatively affected every title in the industry and Marvel's complete refusal to do *any* advertising for the ongoing title.

I quit the book because, at that time, I strongly felt that my creative effort and energy far eclipsed the effort or energy Marvel was putting into the title. I decided to no longer expend and deplete myself to the point where what had been a joyous creative process would have degenerated into an abyss of unhappiness.

I left at the right time, because I still have nothing but fond memories of my collaborators, the characters and the title's loyal readership.

BL: And, I felt, your writing on your last issues of that title seemed rushed and like you had lost your feel for the book. Was this the case?

FN: Well, after #50, I certainly didn't feel that the art meshed with the title or my stories. Knowing you are going to quit tends to suck some of the energy out of the process and that's often reflected in the finished work. You'd wish that were not so, but it's basic human nature. That being said, I think my last issue on that title - #53 was it? - happened to be one of my best.

*BL: You're an **Avengers** junkie... what was it like to get a chance to actually write the series and would you like another crack at it (surely, you must be regarded as one of the logical successors to Busiek)?*

FN: Well, it was incredibly frustrating to get a chance to write the series for a few issues and do such a lame-ass job. Howard dragged me in to help finish a story John Byrne had started, so I had to script off his plot and then plot/script the end of a long storyline with no clue how John had intended to finish it. Then I had to rush out the bi-weekly storyline, so I took what had been a working 12-issue outline for a future **Avengers** pitch should the monthly book ever become available and I condensed it into 6 issues. It was borderline panic time, just trying to get the material done in time. In hindsight, *The Crossing Line* story certainly didn't work, though with its originally intended more leisurely 12 issue pacing, it might have made an excellent storyline.

Then later, Ralph asked me to help Bob out on the schedule before he became the monthly writer. I had already (easily) negotiated with Bob to get Rage off **The Avengers** and on to **New Warriors**, so I wrote a 2-part "Sons of the Serpent" story that would ease the transition for the character. Actually, that 2-parter was okay. Great art from Steve Epting. I'm okay with that one!

As for the monthly title, well, I would love a crack at it! Mind you, I say that with all due respect to Kurt, who has had one of the strongest runs in that title's long-history. I certainly

don't think he's going anywhere. Should the day come when he chooses to relinquish the monthly assignment, I'd love a chance to pitch for it, but that's all speculation.

I'd also be wary of your presumption that I would "surely" be regarded as a successor to Kurt, since nowadays, outside of Tom Brevoort's continued support, I am generally not regarded *at all* by the majority of the editorial staffs at either Marvel or DC. And since Tom is consistently considered among the "Top Editors," I guess it's comforting to know that quality recognizes quality!

*BL: You talk about scratching around for fill-ins in that period, but surely filling in on series such as **New Mutants** and the **X-Men** titles must have been a dream come true?*
FN: Actually, "scratching around for fill-ins" during that period - late 1988 to 1990 - involved Annual back-ups, inventory stories for **Web of Spider-Man**, **Daredevil**, **Dr. Strange**, **Marvel Comics Presents**, etc. They were fun assignments that helped teach me a lot about pace and craft, but they certainly weren't "plum" assignments.

The X-stuff - even the crappy Annual work I did for the X-family - percolated well after much of that other work you mention such as **New Warriors**, **Alpha Flight** or **New Mutants.**

BL: I have to admit to actually liking those first few issues, the ones post-Claremont (although we know he came back briefly).
FN: Yeah, I'm sure Chris liked them, too.

*BL: What was the score with the Muir Island/Legion story? Cast your mind back, was this just a straightforward script of Chris Claremont's plot, or did you actually have any input in it? The reason I'm intrigued is because that is why I personally had hopes for you as an **X-Men** writer.*
FN: At that time, I only really got one side of the story - Bob's - but being on the inside, we all saw he was having problems with Chris. There wasn't a single isolated issue, but a long-running series of differences of opinions.

Afterwards, I got Chris's side of the story - and his dire warnings to expect the same thing to happen to me. Based on the experience of hindsight - and in Chris's defense - Bob probably didn't communicate his problems very well to Chris at all. In Bob's defense, Chris had been on the books a long time and everyone needs a change of pace once in a while, a new voice.

All I know is that Bob asked me to script an issue that had already been pencilled (what was that, **Uncanny** #278?) and then asked me to plot the concluding chapter of the story. I didn't know exactly what Chris had planned, I just talked it through with Bob and finished the story. I wasn't replacing Chris at that time – and I wanted to be sure of that before I accepted the assignment - I was merely pinch-hitting so that he could get over whatever hump he and Bob had run into.

*BL: What was the difference between Fabian the writer of **X-Men** and Fabian the writer of **X-Force**?*
FN: Fabian the writer of **X-Men** did not have the trust of his editor. Fabian the writer of **X-Force** was given enough rope by his editor to swing or hang himself.

Bob gave me more slack - in plotting and especially in dialoguing - for **X-Force** than he ever did with **X-Men**. Besides, Bob cared much more for the two core X-books than he did for any of the ancillary titles. They were far more important to him and the company's licensing program, and that's both obvious and understandable.

Like I said, I think **X-Force** had some very strong issues with Greg Capullo, and even my run with Tony Daniel had some good issues here and there. But even **X-Force** became

harder to write as we went along because Bob was afraid of taking it towards its natural destination - which would have been far more hardened radical mutant-militants. Plus he had Scott [Lobdell] whispering in his ear about how every title should be handled. The situation allowed Bob's natural insecurities to further undermine his ability to determine what he liked or didn't like, and why.

To appease Bob's uncertainty and Scott's machinations - and when not involved in the required quarterly crossover - we decided to explore some smaller character-based issues between #30 and #43. Their qualitative success varied depending on the individual issue. I do think the majority of the fans of that book would have preferred to continue with straight-out hard-moral-choices action adventure as per Rob's initial parameters combined with the approach Greg and I had applied.

As far as **X-Men** was concerned, basically, I failed to earn Bob's trust in my first few issues of **X-Men** post-*Executioner's Song*. I was feeling my way through rather blindly. Due to the very late defections of the Image gang, we were thrown into the books directly into a major crossover (*Executioner's Song*). It was heady and fun from an adrenaline standpoint, but very tentative and timid from the standpoint of craft. I was trying to get Chris's voice out of my head, trying to find a way to mesh with Andy Kubert - and in those few months, I think I quickly lost my editor's support.

By the time I felt far more comfortable with the book, the characters and what I really wanted to do, it was too late. Bob had Scott whispering in one ear, he had his own borderline pathological fear of confrontation and commitment whispering in his other ear - and that left no ears for me! ☺

For my work on that book to have been qualitatively successful would have required that Bob trust me to work as I do best - plan out long-term storylines, interweave sub-plots, build towards major changes for character status quos, etc. He was unwilling to trust me over such a long haul - and eventually not even issue to issue! Later on, around the latter 30s into the 40s, it got to the point where I was being reined in within issues. I couldn't plot pages 6-10 until he talked to Scott about what was going to happen in **Uncanny,** which was coming out before or after (depending on how screwed they were on their schedule). So I would plot the first 5 pages of an issue so that Andy could be drawing and I still wouldn't know exactly how the story would end.

That explains all the fits and starts with storylines that went nowhere, like Mr. Sinister, the Legacy Virus, etc. Really not the best way to work, you know. But again, little violins please, because I was whore enough to cash the checks. I don't excuse my greed, I merely explain how it affected the quality of the work that was credited to me!

*BL: Was this the percentages game dealing you a better hand or were the rules of engagement less strict on **X-Force**?*
FN: Probably a bit of both. Bob has a lot of strengths as both an editor and a writer, but one of his admitted weaknesses was in the use of humor and accepting the need for character by-play, both elements of the mix I had in **X-Force**, so he backed off on that. Any time I tried to have any **X-Men** character so much as come close to having a sense of humor, out came the red marker! ☺**X-Men** weren't allowed to laugh.

*BL: I've heard horror stories about creators working on the X-books. Artists and writers refusing to work on them because of almost indefinable lists of dos and don'ts and style guides which have to be adhered to. Did you enjoy writing **X-Men**? I mean outside of the fact that you earned shitloads of money from it... :)*
FN: No, for the most part, I did not enjoy working on **X-Men**, ever. Of course, there were some fun times between Scott, Bob and myself, lots of travel, lots of banter, Pizza Hut videos and lots of money, but the creative process preferred by Scott and Bob was wholly non-conducive to my strengths as a writer, therefore my work suffered, as did the title.

The "idea" portion of the collaboration was always fun. Fleshing out those ideas was always fun. The problems arose when it came time to assign the pacing of those ideas into actual plots. Then our working methods prevented our ability to mesh.

Conversely, there was a lot more creative pleasure derived from my work on **X-Force**, especially with Greg Capullo (where the heck *is* he anyway?). I think our run together, from like #14 to 25, stands out very nicely in retrospect.

*BL: Yeah, I've been wondering what happened to that Capullo fella :). But the run of issues the two of you did on **X-Force** are probably the high point of the entire series. I get the impression you actually enjoyed that comic. What happened at the end?*
FN: I was fired off **X-Force** in the middle of that personally horrific *Age of Apocalypse* storyline. Basically, Bob said he wanted a "change of pace," not caring much that we'd left issue #43 on a major cliffhanger. I can honestly say I was surprised, because I'd expected to get canned off **X-Men**, not **X-Force**. I think letting me stay on **X-Men** longer was Bob's way of tossing a few more months' worth of bigger royalty checks to me, which I guess was pretty nice of him.

Since I saw the handwriting on the wall, I knew the magnanimity of his gesture wouldn't survive the vultures circling my dying body for much longer, so I quit **X-Men** just a few issues later (#45).

BL: In fact, how does it feel to be replaced on a book?
FN: Depends on the situation. When you leave a book voluntarily, you should either shut your mouth and stand off to the side or actively root for your successors. I certainly did one or the other on any title I left, like **Alpha Flight** and **New Warriors**.

If you're being fired off the book, well, my basic approach is, forget it ever existed. To this day, I've only read 2 issues of Jeph Loeb's **X-Force**, and that was only years later when I was asked to write the 1999 **X-Force Annual** and needed to reference that work. Mind you, I love Jeph and I love his work, but I had no interest in seeing what he did on **X-Force**.

Even though Bob didn't fire me off **Cable** - I fired myself! ☺ - I never read **Cable** again until I saw Ladronn's art on it and it intrigued me that the character had such a different feel. I will probably read some of the current David Tischman run since he and I have been "Hollywood acquaintances" since long before he started writing comics.

If in the two times I had been fired - **X-Force** and **Gambit** - I'd ever been given *anything* resembling a reason - *any* reason, not even a legitimate one! - then maybe I wouldn't carry the overwhelming indifference I feel towards my experience. I've fired freelancers myself, sometimes I've handled it better than others, but I've always at least tried to be communicative and explain why I was making the change.

To this day, all I know about getting shit-canned off **X-Force** - a Top 10 selling book at the time - and **Gambit** was an amorphous, mumbled, "it needs a change of pace." And of course, the editor(s) had not *once* mentioned that the books had been on a pace that needed to be changed, but, hey... there you go.

Some editors, the worst kind, are so deathly afraid of confrontation that they fail to communicate in any reasonable fashion. Publishing superhero genre comics for Marvel and DC is a creative collaboration. By that very definition, there will be differences of opinion. If, as an editor, you're terrified of openly discussing those differences and prefer to just change things behind people's backs, don't explain why, hide and let everything fester, then guess what? No matter how well your titles might be selling, that still makes you a bad editor.

Luckily for Marvel and the industry during the latter 90s, apparently being bad at your job meant getting promoted.

BL: What if you think you're doing an especially good job? How do you bounce back?
FN: Well, it shakes your confidence, no doubt about it. But what are you going to do? You move on. I personally dissect what I didn't do right creatively in comparison to what they didn't do right professionally and see which side of the ledger gets more marks against it.

Realizing that you are being so unfairly persecuted makes accepting it easier, and to pontificate with indignant self-righteousness too! And that's always fun...

BL: In all the time I read your run on that book, I felt you were going through the motions. I had huge hopes for you and no hopes at all for Scott (Lobdell). Did you feel you achieved what you wanted to?
FN: Except for the wedding of Scott and Jean and for maintaining very strong sales throughout our run for the company, not a single thing went as I would have wanted it to.

BL: Did the criticism affect you at all?
FN: Criticism from whom? The Internet? It barely existed back then. Readers? For anyone who had a bad thing to say, there were fifty who were praising it. For every reader who might have quit the title, we gained ten more young ones from the cartoon. We did store signings for 8 hours straight at that time. Convention signings for 5 or 6 hours straight. Lines were enormous. Fans were devouring the titles. If they liked them or not was individually subjective, but they were buying them! In that regard, it was no different from the "criticism" Chris Claremont endured for years during the last phase of his tenure on the titles, all the while maintaining them as the industry's #1 sellers!

Qualitative opinions are so completely subjective that it is difficult to gauge your personal creative standing from what others say. Basically, you have to go by three factors: your own opinion, your editors' opinion and sales. In that regard, I lost two out of three battles!

Mind you, this was 10 years ago, so speaking about it is almost a third party thought process for me, but I knew while smack dab in the middle of my run that I was screwed. I knew that the way I wanted to work, 12 issue outlines, long range sub-plots, resolutions and advancements, a few *big* things happening to shake stuff up - basically all the things you say you liked about my work in **New Warriors** - was simply not going to happen as long as Bob was editing and Scott was writing the other book.

Neither one of them was capable of working that way. I mean, mentally, they just couldn't function in that

fashion. It had to be haphazard, decisions on the fly, changing your mind in midstream, organic and unorganized. And that's really not a knock on them, it's just they couldn't handle my method and I couldn't handle theirs. It's not courage on my part that I stuck it out, it's actually cowardice. Others who preferred working the way I do up and left the family pretty damned quickly. Peter David and Marc DeMatteis - they quit on a dime. I applaud their creative integrity. In many ways, of course, I wish I had. But there were those checks. And that little rational voice in the back of my head was saying, "You can set your family up for life. You can pay your kids' college education - and your kids aren't even born yet!"

I am and always have been, at the core, a pretty practical guy. I will never be a "great writer" because I lack the fundamental requirement of mania necessary for genius. So here I am, in many ways my writing career took some major hits because so many of the people doing the hiring today equate my name with that work. As a result, I think I often don't get work now because of that perception (that's not the only reason, of course, but certainly one of them, I think).

On the other hand, ten years later and into the future, I am lucky to have enough financial security that my family can ride out nearly any bad storm we might run into.

There is no right or wrong, there were just personal choices. I made mine, so, if you don't mind, I'll just put away the small violin now.

BL: Would you write the X-books again?
FN: Not that I'd ever be asked, but probably not. Besides, it seems Grant is getting to do half the things I wanted to but wasn't allowed to! ☺

BL: Forgetting the monetary side of things, do you think ***Gambit*** *was a good idea for an ongoing series;and do you think the book was held back by a succession of "new-style" artists after the departure of Steve Skroce, when it really needed another artist who could put as much into Remy as you were putting into writing him?*
FN: Well, I do think a solo **Gambit** book was/is a good idea, because on his own, he is a *far* different character than he ever has been in the X-titles. On his own, he's an *excellent* character, full of humor, adventure, conflict, romance, angst, etc. He operates out of an exciting milieu, with interesting supporting characters, worldwide settings and so on.

I think our first year on that title was some very, very good work. I think that although Steve and I butted heads a lot, we produced some damned fun, entertaining and thought-provoking stories. I also think we "redeemed" and "reclaimed" the character after several creative missteps had been taken with him in the previous years.

And I willingly admit, for reasons not completely of my own making, but enough that were, that our second year was relatively weak.

I was fired well before the book was cancelled, so although Joe Quesada's decision to "prune the dead X-wood" had no effect on me personally, I would still be hard pressed to look at some of the new X-titles out on the stands right now that replaced **Gambit**'s spot in the publishing budget and say they really are better in any way - qualitatively or quantitatively - than Gambit's book was.

Next issue, Phil and Fabe talk some more, concerning Fabian's career at Valiant; getting fired; ***Nomad****;* ***Thunderbolts****; copulating snails; football, and...corned beef? Plus some never before seen artwork!*

THE VERDICT
COMICS REVIEWS

THIS MONTH'S JURY:

Pete Ashton
D.R. Booth
Ade Brown
Rob Cave
Andy Cheverton
Jennifer Cole
Kelvin Green
Nigel Lowrey
Andrew Luke
Steve Miller
Mike Sivier
Chris Spicer
Andy Winter

Would you like to join our reviews team – The Borderline Psychotics? All you have to do is send a sample of two reviews to Andy Winter: reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk and he'll get in touch!

Amazing Spider-Man #35
Marvel
By J Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr.

What do you do when faced with a threat so great that, even though defeated, it cannot be allowed to live? You destroy it, of course.

Ah yes, but what do you do if you can't bring yourself to mete out the killing stroke because of your own morality – the situation faced here by ol' Webhead?

You cop out, that's what.

You introduce a *deus ex machina*, or you get another character to carry out the execution. Far be it from Peter Parker to get blood on his gloves (which are red already so it wouldn't make that much difference).

It's sad to see such a promising story arc end with what must, by now, be an adventure story cliché – especially as it undermines an otherwise stellar first story by JMS.

The shock - is it for real this time? - ending goes some way towards restoring our faith, though.

The Verdict: A staggering conflict, a spectacular letdown, an amazing revelation. Definitely getting there. (MS)

Avengers #46
Marvel
By Kurt Busiek and Manuel Garcia

Kang makes his move! But so does the Master of the World! The US Government prepares to unleash the Sentinels! And - in the middle of it all - The Avengers!

Exciting, eh, isn't it?

Busiek's epic ups the tension and excitement by another notch as the beleaguered Avengers, hard-pressed to find a way of combating Kang, have to face the distraction caused by the Master whilst figuring out how to keep their own Government from

unleashing something which could be worse.

It's tight, it's thrilling, it's... very much a middle part of a comicbook epic. There are a few episodes to go, yet, and we all know it. There are questions yet to be answered - what is the secret of the Scarlet Centurion? Where does the Triune Understanding fit in all this? - so there's a way to go yet.

As for the art of Manuel Garcia and Bob Layton – the latest in a long line of Avengers reserve teams – it's tasty. It isn't George Perez and it's not Alan Davis, but it does make the grade. In fact, Garcia might just be a name to watch.

The Verdict: Smashing superheroics; hopefully there'll be a satisfying conclusion to justify it all. (MS)

Avengers United
Marvel UK
By various writers and artists

Occasionally, the people at the ever-shrinking offices of Marvel UK have a very good idea. One was hiring Simon Furman to write **Transformers**. Another was to collect a number of issues of various Marvel US titles and repackage them as monthly anthology titles. In

the early 90s they had some success with **The Complete Spider-Man**, which collected the four Spidey titles that the US parent company was then publishing. More recently, titles based around Wolverine, the X-Men, Iron Man, the Fantastic Four and the Hulk have been released, as well as a newer Spider-Man title.

Earlier this year, Marvel UK released the first issue of an Avengers anthology. This has proved to be one of their occasional very good ideas. Each issue contains reprints of at least two concurrent issues of the post-Heroes Reborn Avengers, written by Kurt Busiek, as well as reprinting a classic tale. Issue six of United reprints volume three issues #13 and #14, as well as the classic "thawing out" of Captain America from **Avengers** volume one, issue four.

Volume three of **The Avengers** has been one of the most consistently good runs in the title's 40 year history, and by mixing this with selected highlights from that history, the overall package is a very attractive one. Kurt Busiek writes the team very well, and the art on the series varies from good to excellent. It will be a while before readers of this title are treated to the wonderful visuals of Alan Davis that readers of the US title have so recently enjoyed, but until then, they can enjoy George Perez's intricate art and expect Carlos Pacheco's unique and attractive style when the superlative **Avengers Forever** is reprinted.

One excellent aspect of this title's approach is the inclusion of background notes on the stories collected. Over in the US title, similar notes have appeared as a column on the letters page. Here, they are written in such detail as to take up as much as three pages! The style is loose and informal, and the information is very welcome, even to a veteran reader, let alone the newcomers this title is obviously aimed at.

Readers of this title have much to look forward to, but readers of the US title will also find this to be a worthy purchase, even if they have read the original issues, because of the bonus background information, as well as the reprints of the classic, and undoubtedly difficult to find and expensive to buy, stories. Given that this entire bundle is priced only a little higher than a single issue of the US title, it would seem churlish of an Avengers fan not to at least take a look.

The Verdict: Combining the excellent** Avengers **volume three with highlights from the past is a brilliant idea and combined with the low price, makes this an essential purchase. (KG)

Captain America #48
Marvel
By Dan Jurgens and Bob Layton

The final part of the *America Lost* four-parter comes as something of a letdown. It's true that the rumour sites ruined the "shock" ending, but would it ever have been that shocking? The funeral for which the supporting cast had gathered was, as most readers had guessed, for Cap's late World War II sidekick Bucky Barnes, rather than the Star Spangled Avenger himself. But without the retrieval of Bucky's actual body (as the speculators had envisaged) we're left with a feeling that there's very little point or reason for everyone to get so worked up and melancholy about a memorial service that could have happened anywhere, at any time. Did Jurgens want to retrieve Bucky's body only to have the idea vetoed by editorial? That at least would make more sense.

The Verdict: A disappointing end to an all too predictable story arc. (JC)

Creeps #1
Image
By Dan Mishkin and Tom Mandrake

Mark Twain once said, "Golf is a good walk spoiled." Well, Mishkin and Mandrake's **Creeps** is a good comic spoiled.

This is the "Ugly X-Men" when it could and should have been something a little more sinister and foreboding. The Creeps are a bunch of superheroes who just all happen to have had some awful genetic cock-up, caused by the Genesys Exec (presumably an evil group of megalomaniac scientists and corporate whores). In fact, there were a lot of similarities between this and the new and thoroughly dreadful Marvel TV series, **Mutant X**.

Had the creators sold this to Vertigo, it really could have been darker, seedier and even frightening, but because we are immediately introduced to the freaks with their poignant codenames, the sense of unease is somewhat destroyed and it's difficult to see past the fact that this is ostensibly a super-team book where the mutants are really mutated. And that is a shame, but presumably the creators didn't take the idea to Vertigo because they wanted to make some money from it - therefore there is a sense of compromise in this comic. It may never have been planned for any other publisher but Image, but... perhaps it should have been.

Dan Mishkin's script, although stilted in places, flows quite well and Tom Mandrake - a bizarre hybrid of Gene Colan, Brent Anderson and Joe Kubert - manages to include enough menace and atmosphere to compensate for the comic's shortcomings.

The Verdict: This is a fun read and something a little different, plus it does look very good and has the kind of cover that will attract the casual browser. (DRB)

Daredevil #25
Marvel
By Bob Gale and Phil Winslade

Behind a David Mack cover which yet again has nothing to do with the story inside, we find the conclusion to a startlingly adult superhero tale. Not adult as in nudity, profanity and blood, but adult as in mature characters behaving in mature ways.

The villain is unveiled, but we discover he is not about to unleash a living hell upon Daredevil and the citizens of New York; rather, he is testing his powers - and DD is the guinea pig.

Playing to the Camera has been an entertaining read, but it's a slow burner. Scripter Bob Gale isn't flashy with the superheroics, with Winslade and Hodgkins following his lead to produce workmanlike - but not award-winning - visuals.

At times it reads like a film script; hardly a surprise as Bob Gale has a screenwriting background. Or a TV episode, especially when one regards the cringeworthy laugh moment at the end.

The twist on the subject of a superhero's identity suggests lots of interesting opportunities for other writers to follow up.

The Verdict: A courtroom thriller in which the villain doesn't even take the stand. Refreshing, maybe, but also something of an anticlimax. (MS)

Expo 2001
Comic Book Legal Defence Fund
By various creators

The Expo anthology is a showcase for small press and independent creators, particularly those who attend the annual Expo comics festival in Bethesda, Maryland. At a weighty 352 pages – featuring 62 strips, seven interviews and three creator features – this is exceptional value for the price of $7.95.

Inevitably, with a collection of this size and scope, there will be disappointments; and Expo 2001 has at least its fair share of these. For every gem discovered within its pages, there will be a pointless, ugly and badly choreographed parody of what is possible in comic art. These will depend a large amount on personal taste, however.

But the gems are many and varied; Thomas Ott's twisted *noir* tale *The Millionairs* (*sic*) is quite beautiful, told on pages of heavily intricate scratchboard art; Roger Langridge's *Mugwump's Big Night* is a poignant story of misunderstanding and unrequited love, with a lovely, old-fashioned feel to the art; Pete Sickman-Garner's *Game Time* is a fabulously funny bad taste cartoon; and Blutch's *Je Te Deux* is a sweet tale of romance with a twist, told

without dialogue and a wonderfully free page design that separates each panel using the light and dark elements within them rather than inked borders. There are more, but these were the ones that stuck in my mind.

Absolutely the stand out piece, however, is Art Spiegelman's *Abstract Thought Is A Warm Puppy*, a wonderful homage and tribute to Charles Schultz and the Peanuts gang. Using Schultz's art style perfectly, Spiegelman manages to say quite a lot about the massive influence on himself and the medium that the strip has had over the years. Despite being written before Schultz's death, it would be an apt eulogy.

The Verdict: At this sort of price, you'd be hard pressed to not find it value for money, particularly as the proceeds go to the C.B.L.D.F. For more information, check out the website at** www.spxpo.com. **(AC)

Fantastic Four #48
Marvel
By Carlos Pacheco, Rafael Marin and Jeph Loeb

Far out! The FF have to find the ultimate nullifier before Abraxas destroys the Earth! Its location is hidden in the minds of three alternate-Earth Johnny Storms, so our version is sent out into space with Nova to begin his quest while the three others disappear into the multiverse to pilfer clues to its location from his alternates' minds.

Then he can pick up the nullifier, see off Abraxas, and they'll all be home in time for tea. Right?

If only it were that easy! If only it were less predictable, too.

This is a fast-paced story, and there's nothing wrong with the artwork, but you just *know* right from the outset that they're going to be betrayed and will have to find another way to defeat the baddie.

The Verdict: Cosmic! But lacking the sense of wonder that made previous space sagas such compulsive page-turners. (MS)

Fantastic Four 1234 #3
Marvel Knights
By Grant Morrison and Jae Lee

Doom's plan to remove three members of the FF while Reed Richards is, well, immersed in thought moves to its final phase - and it looks as though he is succeeding.

The Sub-Mariner appears to have neutralised the Invisible Woman, Mole Man is ready to torture the Human Torch and turn Alicia into a harem girl, and the Thing, in human form, has suffered the loss of a limb and is wallowing in self-pity.

All is going to plan - or is it?

The fact that it is the human part of the plan that goes awry suggests Morrison is telling us a little about Doctor Doom's thinking - he relies on machines, on mechanical means, too much. Perhaps he isn't as good a judge of character as he thinks he is. And now the stage is set for the final encounter between Doom and Mr Fantastic.

There's a lot of sound and fury, but at least here it signifies something. This is like a Marvel comic of maybe 20 years ago, when we were actually interested in the minds and motivations of the characters rather than just whether they looked cool.

Jae Lee carries off the action and the dialogue with equal skill, and it seems unfair that his art has been criticised from some quarters when it is at least as striking as that featured in the regular Fantastic Four title.

Most of all, the last page of this issue left me keen to get the next one. Surely the most potent sign of a comic's quality?

The Verdict: Easily the strongest FF story for years. (MS)

Felon #1
Top Cow
By Greg Rucka and Matthew Clark

From the evidence of this first issue, this is little more than casting a female in the Lee Marvin role from the movie *Point Blank* (or, for our younger readers: casting a female in the Mel Gibson role from the movie *Payback*). Cassiday gets out of jail after a three-year stretch and goes after her former accomplices for her share of the money from the job for which she was set up to take the rap. Like Lee and Mel, she just wants her money and she'll do whatever's necessary to get it.

Rucka's script is lean and atmospheric, peppered rather than littered with some violence and swearing. It's an efficient, if uninspiring, start, spending some time with the main character and setting the mood. This is a languid first issue, more suited to an ongoing series than to a miniseries, but we'll have to wait and see which one this becomes.

Where this issue fails, though, is in the art department. It is attractive - and well inked by Ray Snyder - but Clark has little idea of how to tell the story. His characters move needlessly between panels, creating a narrative confusion, and his backgrounds are cluttered and unrelated to each other, leaving many of his pages without any cohesion. A pick-pocketing sequence is so badly illustrated that not only is the elegance of the operation lost, but the characters seem to teleport around each other. Elsewhere, Cassiday's first confrontation results in a fight in a garage between her and two men. What actually happens during this is mostly a mystery, as Clark's angles switch viewpoints and characters around, leave important information off-panel, and insists on trying to look clever only to the detriment of the story. It's good value to be able to read a comic more than once, but not because the thing was mostly unintelligible on a first reading.

The Verdict: I buy comics for the writers, so I take art as it comes, good or bad according to my taste. But I object to the artist hindering the writer with incompetent storytelling and an ignorance of how comics actually work. (AC)

BEHIND EVERY "SELFLESS" ACT, BEHIND EVERY EXAMPLE OF SO-CALLED HEROISM, THERE LIES THE CRAVING FOR VALIDATION AND STATUS IN THE EYES OF OTHERS.
IS IT ONLY THE LESSONS OF OUR EXPERIENCE WHICH MAKE MONSTERS OF US, OR SAINTS?
GAME STATUS?

Above: Doc Doom opening some curtains in a philosophical manner

Four Women #1
Homage Comics
By Sam Kieth

A welcome return to the medium for Kieth, a self-effacing creator whose modesty belies the fact that he is certainly one of the best talents we have, as well as being the best male writer of female characters since Neil Gaiman left the building.

Following on from this year's previous series, **Zero Girl**, Kieth now tries his hand at an all-female cast, with considerable success. Bev, Donna, Marion and Cindy are the four women of the title; all of different ages, backgrounds and outlooks on an ill-fated road trip to a wedding reception which they will never manage to attend.

Kieth uses a flashback approach to his story, in a method similar to the Thora Birch movie *The Hole*. There is considerable suspense to be wrung from such an approach and Kieth utilises this from the very first page. Our narrator is Donna, and we hear her story as she relays it to her therapist, beginning at nine hours before midnight as the women enjoy the trip and each other's company. From there we jump to midnight and their car trouble ending with a shadowy male figure approaching the car, and on to two hours after midnight when the entire journey - and the women themselves - have taken a darker turn.

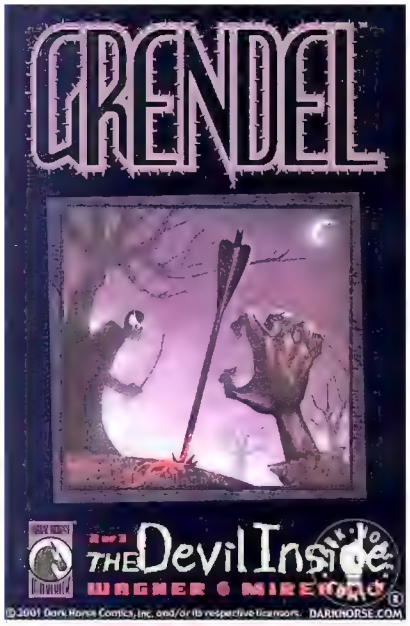
The art is as expressive and original as ever, with each character given a unique and distinctive look that matches with how they are scripted; and Kieth's wobbly panel layout engages the eye, never once losing the attention or the point of focus.

Kieth wrings the maximum effect out of this disjointed narrative, insisting the readers do their part in

assembling the story and connecting the dots, in a symbiosis between author and reader that is more usual in novels than in comics. If only more creators had this grasp of the medium.

The Verdict: Simultaneously dark and charming, with a defiantly bold approach to the storytelling, this deserves to do well for Kieth, who is an underrated, yet always appreciated, creator. (AC)

Grendel: The Devil Inside #2
Maverick
By Matt Wagner and Bernie Mireault



And so the mental collapse of Brian Li Sung continues. Hounded by his remorse and situation, Brian now has people from his past catching up with him, both friend and foe, and these are summarily sent on their way. As his detachment from society continues, Brian's dual nature comes to the fore as he and Grendel battle for possession of body and soul, leading to one of the most chilling final pages of any comic.

This storyline really is some of the best comics ever published, and this is a welcome reprinting. Wagner's new cover is striking (although finding space within the issue for the original Mireault cover – painted by Ken Steacy – would have been a nice idea).

Try as I might, I can't find evidence of these new "colour fx" that Mireault has supposedly added (although he does appear to have redrawn a character's eye in one panel). These are quibbles, though.

The Verdict: A classic and hard to find back issue, repackaged and available again straight from the shelf. (AC)

Harley & Ivy: Love on the Lam
DC
By Judd Winick and Joe Chiodo

There may be few of us out here in the world of comics-buying men who would be able to resist a comic - however extravagantly priced - featuring the twin allure of both Ms. Isley and Ms. Quinzel, especially those of us who are still waiting for the long promised Dini & Timm series. Resistance is, in a very real sense, futile.

Winick's script finds Harley Quinn once again ousted by the Joker and teaming up with Poison Ivy in order to win her way back into Mister J.'s affections. There are a million stories in Gotham City and this is that old one again. There are guest appearances by Two-Face and Bat-Girl (sort of), and hi-jinks and escapades in the tradition of the animated series. Batman and Robin are played with a little too lightly here, but the whole thing is frothy and genuinely amusing, if never managing to be outright hilarious.

Chiodo sticks closely to the animated style for his portrayals of the main characters, which is no bad thing. There are a lot of sketchy background characters, which is jarring in a painted comic, and a great many of the backgrounds themselves appear to be little more than indiscriminate splodges of paint that Chiodo had lying around and needed to use up. He is primarily known as a cheesecake artist though, and in this he rarely disappoints.

The Verdict: Accurate depictions of the villains, if not the heroes, and imposing male characters and sexy female ones. It's funny, silly and plain fun; in a Harley & Ivy comic what more would you expect? (AC)

Joss Whedon's Fray #4
Dark Horse
By Joss Whedon and Karl Moline

Rumour has it that *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon prepared for this, his first comics work, by reading a sample script by Alan Moore. If that is truly all the preparation he had, then Whedon's achievement with this series is even more stunning than it appears at first glance.

He has created a masterpiece, a product that stands equal in many ways to its parent television series and no longer seems like a spinoff. **Fray** now exists on its own merits as a unique part of the Slayer mythos.

Fray's world is akin to *Judge Dredd*'s Mega-City One, a post-apocalyptic urban sprawl with its own dialect and social order. Whedon's skill shines through in his evocative portrayal of this world - in only four issues, he has made it all seem real. The characters are well developed and well written. The central character, future Slayer Melaka Fray, survives comparisons with Buffy by being noticeably different whilst retaining those qualities that make her a Slayer. She is just as independent and strong-willed as her televisual counterpart, just in a different way. The plot, too, has been remarkably well structured thus far, and although the occasional comic cliché crops up (as with this issue's cliffhanger ending), they are presented with such skill that the familiarity does not become immediately tiresome.

Penciller Karl Moline is an extraordinary find. His strong, simple artwork may be a little disconcerting at first, precisely because of its cartoon-like simplicity. After a while, however, the strengths of the style become apparent. Moline draws with flair, showing a knack for dynamic storytelling, and even though his style looks simple it would be a mistake to say that it is limited, for he has shown that he is more than capable of drawing any pose, from any angle, with no trouble.

This is one of Dark Horse's finest publications to date. Due to under-printing, earlier issues may not be easy to locate, so this reviewer urges the company not to make the same mistake with the inevitable collected edition, and also urges, with similar gusto, everyone yet to sample the delights of this comic to go and buy the trade upon its release.

The Verdict: A superb series so far, with no signs of doing anything but improving. (KG)

Kabuki #½
Image
By David Mack

I've never been able to understand the attraction behind **Kabuki**, despite the fact that over the years Mack has improved as a storyteller. His artwork still varies from the sublime to the small press, and what little story there is in this is difficult to critique – it's a bit like asking someone to write a review of a collection of words.

It's all very slickly put together and the fanboys will be in rapture (there's a semi-nude painting of the heroine on page five), but it's all style and no content and one day comics publishers and editors might just realize this isn't what we want.

The Verdict: Nothing to see here that might tempt new readers into parting with their money. (DRB)

Kissing Chaos #1-2
Oni Press
By Arthur Dela Cruz

Kissing Chaos is an eight-issue miniseries published every three weeks for a competitive $2.25 per 16-page instalment (or $1.95 as an introductory price for the first issue). It's a similar publishing experiment to Marvel's **US War Machine**, but with the added value of having a coherent, mature plotline with rounded characters, believable dialogue, discernibly professional art

and storytelling ability above that of a monkey with a blunt pencil. Which is nice.

Arthur Dela Cruz is a colourist for Oni Press and this is his writing and drawing debut (apart from a couple of short Kissing Chaos stories published elsewhere).

Raevyn spends the night with an unnamed "typical male asshole" and wakes up alone in his apartment the next morning, so she steals his laptop. Angela goes into a diner with the blood-spattered Damien, before they are forced to leave rapidly with the arrival of a police car. They attempt to steal a car currently being stolen by Raevyn, and all escape together. In the second issue, Angela has a flashback and another twist enters the story. Both issues have scenes of Angela with a gun at her head, an as yet unexplained incident.

It sounds slight in summary, yet it's a confident and intriguing start, utilizing a disjointed motif that leaves a lot of the interpretation of events up to the reader. The narrative voice for **Kissing Chaos** is Angela's, and she doesn't appear to have both oars in the water (actually, she may not even have both oars), so her narration gives the events a mysterious, dreamlike edge. To tell a tale from such an unreliable viewpoint is a risky gambit, but Dela Cruz pulls it off, helped somewhat by the brevity of each instalment.

Bravely, he has elected to do this comic in ink and grey tones rather than use his colouring talents as a crutch with which to prop up his fledgling attempts at doing his own comic story. It gives his art a chance to work on its own, which it does admirably.

The Verdict: An ambitious beginning to what may well turn out to be one of the most impressive indie debuts we'll see this year. **(AC)**

La Perdida
Fantagraphics
By Jessica Abel

Having never read any issues of Jessica Abel's comic **Artbabe**, I didn't know what to expect from her latest series, **La Perdida**. What I found was the all too infrequent experience of a new comic that leaves you aching for the next issue by the time you reach the final page.

La Perdida is the story of Carla, a half Mexican outsider in the country of her father's birth, who is in search of her heritage but will only end up as an exile from a land that she will come to love. Blending together the crime fiction elements with an almost diary-like approach, Abel shows off her excellent sense of pacing, slowly edging the reader forever onwards deeper and deeper into the story.

But the real highlight of the narrative is Abel's hauntingly beautiful portrayal of Mexico, her love of the country shining through in every panel, whether showing it in all its glory or all its corruption.

Visually, Abel bears the strong influence of David Mazzucchelli in her simple yet expressive line work. It also carries about it more than a passing resemblance to Posy Simmonds's work.

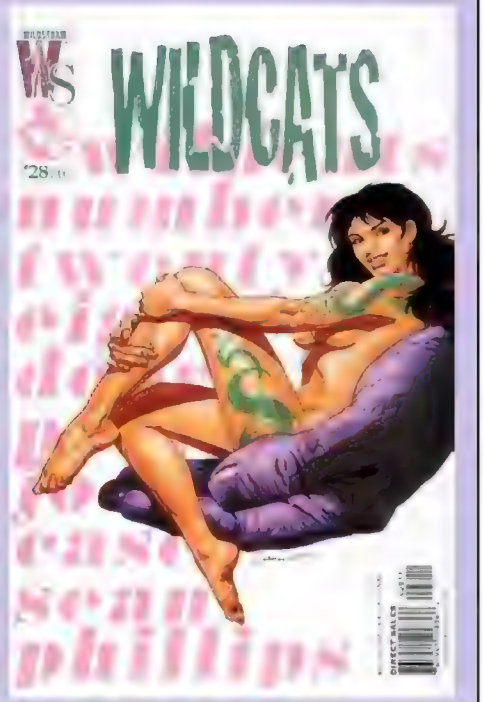
The Verdict: If, like me, you had never tried Jessica Abel's work before, *La Perdida* ***offers an excellent starting point. Abel is a talent that reminds you why you read comics in the first place. (RC)***

Marvel Knights #15
Marvel Knights
By Chuck Dixon and Ed Barreto

A composite team comprised of all the characters whose solo books

GOOD COP/ BAD COP

Wildcats #28
DC/Wildstorm
By Joe Casey and Sean Phillips



Good Cop – Jennifer Cole

The last issue in the current series of Wildstorm's flagship title winds up with a sentimental glance through the Wildcats' near decade-long history. Beginning with a world-weary Jeremy (Maul) Stone looking over a cracked Jim Lee-drawn "photo" of the team's early days as he muses "Was it ever so simple?", the main body of the story is a talking heads sequence between Voodoo and a friendly Daemonite echoing the Alan Moore plot that turned the comic on its head by showing the team that everything they'd been fighting for was a sham.

Revisiting James Robinson's Volume I, issue #18 musings (in which he wrote the best Vision/Scarlet Witch story never told) Casey once again forces Voodoo to analyse her love for the android Spartan. "What we were to each other was real. At least, it was to me," she says, so revealingly, but then Casey dares to turn this on its head as well, by doing everything he can to indicate that Spartan does care more than Voodoo will ever realize. In a series that has, at times, been characterized by extreme violence amid the dark humour, this is a bittersweet close to a complex, multi-layered run.

Sometimes criticized for its inaccessibility to new readers, Volume II of **Wildcats** has never been afraid to take the space it needed to show the bigger picture. In its own way, this is exactly what this final issue delivers, taking a step back from the fast-paced action adventure to remind us that **Wildcats** has grown from its Big Guns and style-over-substance beginnings to be one of the most complex and rewarding of the long-running Wildstorm titles, in which the characters have developed well beyond their one-dimensional roots. Roll on Volume 3.

The Verdict: A tender tie-up to the latest volume of adventures for Wildstorm's flagship heroes. (JC)

Bad Cop – Mike Sivier

We close the covers on **Wildcats** Volume two with more of a sense of relief than of satisfaction. Noir's scheme has been foiled, Emp has ascended to a higher state of contemplating his navel, Spartan has found new purpose in life as a mega-corporation, and now Voodoo's legs are healed with aid from a pacifist(!) Daemonite, presumably so she can walk off into the sunset with the big purple guy whose codename escapes me. Jeremy.

Interesting? Yes. Exciting? Not at all. Casey and Phillips have taken the book in strange directions over the last two years or so, and some of those directions have made for a distracting read - but they seriously miscalculated when they turned Jim Lee's blood and thunder slugfest into a low-key, character-driven melodrama.

All of which made Casey a surprising choice to write **Uncanny X-Men** - probably the longest-running blood and thunder slugfest in American comics.

The Verdict: Better luck next time - although with a Mature Readers label slapped onto *Wildcats* ***volume three, and all the baggage that comes with that, luck is what*** *Wildcats* ***will need. (MS)***

Click on Globe returns to contents

appeared under the Marvel Knights imprint might not have been the soundest editorial decision, but Chuck Dixon's reliable talent for edgy urban adventure always ensured that this book ticked along nicely. Perhaps with all its heroes moonlighting from elsewhere, however, Dixon lacked the freedom to develop the characters as fully as he has on books such as DC's **Nightwing** and **Birds of Prey**, where his mix of action and soap opera has always worked so well.

Whatever the reasons, **Marvel Knights** never quite fired the readers' imagination, despite some intriguing subplots such as the "where should vigilantes draw the line" disagreements between Daredevil and the Punisher, Moon Knight's attempts to buy himself (and Luke Cage) into the team's favours and the bizarre yin/yang partnership of the Black Widow and Dagger.

Issue 15 brings this ill-considered but often entertaining series to an all too obviously abrupt halt as the heroes decide that it just isn't working and agree to go their separate ways. Truth mirroring fiction and all that - nevertheless, I'll miss it.

The Verdict: A downbeat end to a sadly under-rated series. (JC)

Mech Destroyer #4
Image
By Robert Chong and Jae Kim

This is a truly awful hybrid of everything that's bad about American homage comics. All of these pseudo-manga styled artists and writers in the States seem to have disregarded the immense depth and culture in Japanese comics and just based their "knowledge" on dubbed anime and translated (therefore badly adapted) manga. It left me wondering if Powerhouse Universe (the name of the studio that created this monstrosity) had done something unsavoury to land such a gig?

However, just as I was about to consign this and the studio responsible for it to the garbage pail, I happened upon the preview in the back... *Defiance* is a new series from the same people that brought you **Mech Destroyer**, so the immediate reaction would be to move somewhere else and quickly. However, while Jae Kim seems inept at actually merging US and Japanese art together in the main feature, the artist on *Defiance* seems to have fused art and computer generated graphics very well. It looks and feels a bit like *Resident Evil*, but it shines like a jewel in a pile of shit in comparison to the main comic.

The Verdict: Check out** Defiance **when it's released, but don't go anywhere near** Mech Destroyer **- unless you really are just a hopeless manga junkie. (DRB)

Ministry Of Space #2
Image
By Warren Ellis and Chris Weston

History rewritten again by Warren Ellis, this time the story of how Great Britain won the space race hands down in the name of God, the Queen and Empire. Nothing spectacularly new here, it's all a bit flat in fact, again maybe reading better in a collected edition. Chris Weston's art strikes the right heroic level without causing eyes to pop out or jaws to drop open.

The Verdict: Hardly essential, nor unputdownable, this is little more than Ellis by numbers. (DM)

New X-Men #117
Marvel
By Grant Morrison and Ethan Van Sciver

Morrison's story delivers a kick in the

teeth to fanboys (of either gender) who think the Beast's new look is cool - and a healthy boost to readers who believe superhero comics' finest moments come from the human stories of those inside the costumes.

The human story, in this case, is about the Beast. As he puts it himself: "Every day I wake up and I look in the mirror, and I feel like more of a monster than the day before... Every day!"

But there are more facets to his character than that: "I... I... have a doctorate degree! I can turn the Periodic Table into a dirty rhyme!"

What brings forth these revelations? Merely the Beast's subjugation and humiliation by none other than his mentor, Professor Xavier.

If that little teaser doesn't get you buying this title, nothing will!

The Verdict: Brutal (MS)

Optic Nerve #8
Drawn & Quarterly
By Adrian Tomine

If you're one of those people who is of an age when your birthday matters to you less and less, and you wait for a year, go through the motions and are left with that comfortable sort of melancholy that is vanished by the next morning, then you'll know how reading **Optic Nerve** feels.

Tomine's characters are lost and adrift, and the anchors they choose are not always the most secure. Cruelties are inflicted almost indifferently, if not by accident or habit, and no character is allowed to be wholly sympathetic or unlikeable. In the end, they all exist in a world as grey and solid as the artwork that tells their tale.

This story - *Bomb Scare* - plays out against the backdrop of the Gulf War and concerns Scotty and Cammie, students living on the fringes of their respective peer groups, each finding support from the other when their fragile worlds begin to change and fragment.

Optic Nerve tends to be a distant and cold sort of comic, an approach that would ruin most attempts at narrative. Tomine exploits this to his advantage, focussing on teens as they really tend to be; callous, confused and with easily divided loyalties.

There is a lot of story in this issue, and the art adopts a four-tier style in order to accommodate it. Tomine's drawing suffers not at all though; if anything his panels are as detailed as ever, with a lovely use of grey tones to highlight and differentiate fore- and background objects. And his talent at conveying subtle facial statement in so few lines is still enviable.

The Verdict: An all too infrequent joy; honest, realistic and melancholy in all the right ways. (AC)

Origin #2
Marvel Comics
By Paul Jenkins and Andy Kubert

There were a lot of people who, upon realizing that *The Empire Strikes Back* was, against all odds, even better than *Star Wars*, quite simply couldn't believe their good fortune. Such is the case with this issue. Essentially, the simmering social tensions of the first issue bubble to the surface and boil over in an intensely staged climax. To say any more about the astonishing complexity of the tale being woven here is going to require revealing a great deal about the content of this and, possibly, of further issues. To say any less though would be to do Jenkins a great disservice.

The Lady Chatterley-influenced hints of last issue bear great fruit, as the least likely of the three candidates for Wolverine comes forward, claws bared. For many this will be the talking point of the comic, yet it seems to me that a conceit is being played by Jenkins which will

resolve with this series leaving more questions than it has answered.

Is this mutant ability original to young James? If not, which of his parents has it? If it is his mother, then how might this pertain to his dead half-brother? If it is his supposed father, the groundskeeper Logan, then his demise at the end of this issue may not be at all final. And what of his other half-brother - Logan's other son, Dog? What aspects, if any, has he inherited? Are we, in fact, seeing the origin of Sabretooth also? Those three claw marks along Mistress Elizabeth's side were familiar, and we can assume they didn't come from James, whose claws came as a surprise to all concerned. Was James's conception a forced affair?

And why, most particularly after the events of this issue, would James later take the name of Logan for his own?

Throughout, the art is dynamic (if a little confused in places, most especially the ending) and beautifully coloured; we can only hope this art team stays the course of the series. Quesada's cover is subtle and attention grabbing. But Paul Jenkins is the selling point of this, with as rich and involving a story as I've ever read in superhero comics. I've said it before and I'll say it again: inspired.

The Verdict: It is rare to come away from a comic – mainstream or independent – with so many questions and such a massive sense of enjoyment. Absolutely recommended. (AC)

The Otherworld War
Marvel
By Peter Hogan
and Leonardo Manco

Although the events of Otherworld are set during World War II, and the characters are closely associated with that time, this story actually has more in common with *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. Taking the same starting point of Hitler's fondness for an arcane artefact, Peter Hogan casts Red Skull as the villain and surrounds him with joke German troopers that Freddie Starr would have been proud of - "Ja Mein Skull" indeed. Meanwhile, Captain America and Nick Fury share the "Indiana Jones" role (with Bucky as Karen Allen?).

But this is more than just pastiche. Hogan's heroes gel together nicely, Nick Fury keeps to the character he has developed over the years much more than in the recent Fury series and yet he is definitely a 21st Century version. Captain America is the usual no-nonsense all American hero.

Manco's art is a delight, with some rather obvious set pieces breaking the book up nicely. His Dormammu looks powerful rather than cartoony and the appearance of The Red Skull, a *grand guignol* flayed face rather than someone wearing a Hallowe'en mask, is very impressive.

The Verdict: A must for lovers of supernatural adventure tales in the mould of Indiana Jones. (AB)

Out There #5
Wildstorm
By Brian Augustyn
and Humberto Ramos

Despite its obvious *Buffy* influence, this series has been entertaining enough so far. But it goes off the rails a bit with this issue. Ramos here shows little of the talent hidden behind his art's cartoony façade and the story is non-existent, with only various subplots briefly touched upon. It isn't a hideous issue but it feels like filler material; when the saving grace of a comic is the computer colouring, you have to worry a bit.

The Verdict: A minor distraction rather than the tension-building issue it could have been. (NL)

Peter Parker: Spider-Man #36
Marvel
By Paul Jenkins and Staz Johnson

While the work of Bendis and Straczynski is justly applauded, it's something of a shame that Paul Jenkins' sometimes superb run on this title is being overshadowed, since it is what, only a few years ago, would have seemed an interesting and enjoyable effort. Certainly, Jenkins is a writer of varying quality, but when he is up to the task his Spider-Man tales are worthy of more attention.

Here, private eye Billy Fender has his heart set on a last ditch attempt at a retirement package - the Big Score of the title. You see, Fender has spent six years of digging and scratching and now he has finally figured it all out; he knows who Spider-Man really is and he has the evidence to prove it.

Once more, Jenkins holds all the cards, and we can sit back and watch him play them. This is a fine issue, clever and funny and intent on giving the reader what, once upon a time, all Spider-Man stories could provide - fun. It's become something of a lost art these days when too many titles exist in the fallout from the grim and gritty comics of the last two decades, and we should welcome it back.

Guest artist Staz Johnson does a fair job on the art, and if he fares badly in comparison to regular artist Mark Buckingham, that's only because Buckingham fits this particular character hand in glove. It's a shame that cover artist Humberto Ramos insists on drawing Spidey as if all his limbs were dislocated; it's uncomfortable to look at, for one thing.

The Verdict: If you can find room for one more Spidey title within your monthly budget, this is the one; it's not as revisionist as the Ultimate titles, and not so keen to impress as the Straczynski run, and it's all the better for that. (AC)

Ring of the Nibelung: Götterdämmerung #4
Dark Horse
By P. Craig Russell

With this mammoth 64-page issue, illustrator P. Craig Russell concludes his long-standing quest to adapt

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Wagner's Ring Cycle with a bang. The quality of the work leaps off each page. Glorious artwork and beautiful design result in stunning storytelling, while the wording makes comprehension of Wagner's original German verse possible.

As a piece of comic art, it is probably untouchable. Unfortunately it falters in the scripting department, for while it relays an epic with a minimum of deviation from the original text, there is little room for characterization. Consequently, there is insufficient emotional content to truly absorb readers who are more accustomed to rounder characters. ***The Verdict: Never quite totally absorbing, this nevertheless stands as a masterpiece of comic storytelling. (NL)***

Sandman Presents: The Corinthian – Death in Venice #1
Vertigo
By Darko Macan and Danijel Zezelj

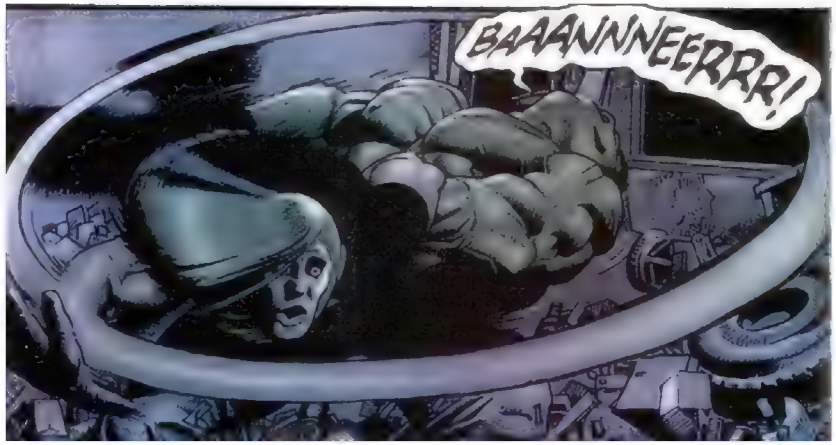
I think it's safe to say that we're all bored of this endless profiteering at the expense of Neil Gaiman, and anything else that really needed to be said was done so by Caitlin Kiernan during her interminable - yet sometimes brilliant - run on **The Dreaming**.

Which is exactly why I nearly didn't buy this; but Macan is an exceptional writer of the war-ravaged protagonist and Zezelj gave such life to Azzarello's recent **El Diablo** that to ignore this, his follow up series, would simply be rude. And so it is reassuring that both creators work so well together here.

Charles Constantine is in 1920s Venice when he once again sees the Corinthian, a figure who has haunted him since the end of World War I. This opening instalment plays out against a backdrop of sex and decadence in which we have no openly sympathetic characters, merely those with shades of cruelty.

Zezelj, whose **El Diablo** impressed with its dusty plains and dry, wooden saloons, pleases once more with his moody rendition of Venice; the crumbling solidity of the ornate buildings and the glassy sheen of the canals. There are a couple of fumbles in storytelling (most especially the war flashback), but the art is very finely drawn and brings extra life to Macan's cast. ***The Verdict: If this can resist falling back on its source material, then we may have an excellent story set more in the real world than usual, and all the better for it. (AC)***

Startling Stories: Banner #3
Marvel
By Brian Azzarello and Richard Corben



In reviewing a book like this which has few redeeming features, it is possible to be sidetracked into wondering what the minds behind it were trying to achieve.

The idea of looking at the Hulk's massive destructive potential - and how to hold him to account for it - is intriguing, but let down here by poor execution.

The Hulk, as depicted here, is a possibility for the character which was wisely avoided until now: the Hulk as brute, with nothing to offer except an extreme response to anyone who comes near him. This creature is far from the simplistic, hounded innocent we have seen in earlier times - and the journey is an unpleasant one.

Likewise, Doc Samson seems to have had a character transplant, from a serious-minded psychiatrist to a flippant risk-taker who will casually order other men to death without batting an eyelid.

If the two principal characters can be so twisted, what hope can there be for the story? This leads one to ask the next logical question - why tell it in the first place? Why give it its own series in which to be told? Why cause a potential split in the parent book's market? For that matter, why not run it *in* **The Incredible Hulk**? ***The Verdict: Like the Hulk's occasional enemy, this is an abomination. (MS)***

Star Wars: Tag & Bink Are Dead
Dark Horse
Kevin Rubio and Lucas Marangon

Taking a cue from Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*, with a touch of *Star Trek DS9's Trials and Tribble-ations*, this has two rebel soldiers who, at the beginning of *Star Wars*, don a couple of Stormtrooper uniforms to evade capture when their Blockade Runner is captured by Vader's Star Destroyer. They then proceed to mill about aimlessly, turning up as every pair of dim-witted Stormtroopers to feature in the film. You know the ones, and half the fun here is recognizing them.

There's a difficult line to tread here, trying to be funny about something that one obviously holds in such reverence, but Rubio succeeds well. Best known for his short online *Star Wars* parody *Troops*, Rubio has trod familiar ground with his comic stories (in both senses of the word) *A Death Star is Born* and *Force Fiction for Star Wars Tales*. **Tag & Bink Are Dead** is not as funny as the former, but much funnier than the latter, with Rubio perhaps finding the length of a full issue rather difficult to fill with humour throughout. It's certainly the case that a more devout *Star Wars* fan will find more to laugh at simply through familiarity with the source material, in much the same way as Stoppard's play relies on some knowledge of *Hamlet*.

Marangon's cartoony art - capably inked by Howard Shum - perfectly captures the Star Wars universe, and his likenesses are particularly accurate and recognisable, even down to the most minor characters. There is one double page spread that could have been better laid out, but otherwise the storytelling is clear, if unadventurous. ***The Verdict: A funny, cartoon romp through the Star Wars universe, told with knowledge and genuine affection. (AC)***

Star Wars Tales #9
Dark Horse
By various creators

Just before the events of *Episode IV*, Darth Vader is sent to the moon of Kalakar 6, where he is expecting to find the recently stolen plans for the Death Star. What he finds instead is a fortress strong with the Dark Side and a formidable, cloaked figure that destroys all of his accompanying Stormtroopers, before Vader is himself confronted by mysterious Sith Lords who wish to challenge his position as the Emperor's apprentice. Vader, they say, still has good in him, and he is required to prove himself in battle against a more worthy candidate; the Emperor's previous apprentice, Darth Maul.

This should be hokey and contrived, little more than a way to sucker fanboys into another purchase. It simply shouldn't work, or be of any merit.

Except that it all pulls together beautifully. Ron Marz's script sets up the situation with a good deal of atmosphere, explaining the cloning of Maul in simple and rational terms. The reasons Vader is challenged make complete sense, as do the reasons for Maul to be the challenger. Rick Leonardi illustrates the fight dynamically, with good likenesses; he captures Maul's arrogant stare and imbues the featureless Vader with excellent emotion through a subtle use of body language.

This is a wonderful tale, told with a mature insight into both of the main characters and exploring depths George Lucas doesn't possess the ability to reach. There are some subtleties and moments that will give all *Star Wars* fans a thrill, but these are best enjoyed within the context of the strip, adding as they do to a far

better tale than we might have expected.

There are two backup stories, which are both crap but mercifully short. Buy this for the main attraction.

The Verdict: What looks like - and may well have been - a cynical marketing exercise actually results in a satisfying and heartfelt addition to the Star Wars mythos. (AC)

Strangers in Paradise #43
Abstract Studios
By Terry Moore

Retcon. Retroactive continuity. Changing an established past in an attempt to make things more interesting in the future. Not unusual in superhero comics. A bit of a jolt here, though.

Terry Moore wraps up what he calls Version One in multi-layered style, leaving the reader questioning whether *any* of what has gone before can be relied upon.

His revelation that the story has been retold to Francine's daughter by herself and Katchoo - and that their memories weren't quite up to the task - leaves the door open for completely different versions of the story with the same characters.

It's an interesting way to go in some ways - but a bit of a let-down for those who've followed the series religiously, expecting it all to resolve itself tidily.

The Verdict: Has Terry pulled a fast one on us? You'll have to read Version Two to find out! (MS)

10th Muse #6
Image
By Marv Wolfman and Roger Cruz

So, that's what happened to Marv Wolfman? Actually the old veteran doesn't turn in a bad job with the script, which seems to be a spin-off from Mike Wieringo's **Tellos** series.

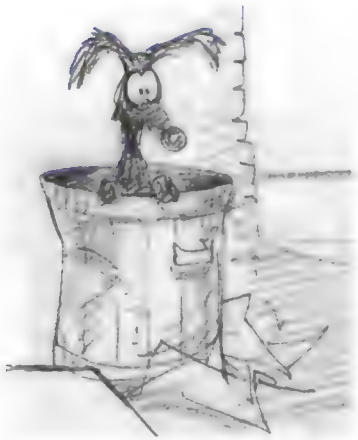
Joining a series at #6 isn't a good thing really because I was completely confused by much of the story, but Wolfman has been around for a long time and at least you can fill in some of the blank spots through the dialogue alone.

To Roger Cruz's credit, the one-time Joe Madureira clone - **X-Men** fill-in artist and more universally derided in the 90s than Rob Liefeld - hasn't compromised his ethics. He still rips off any other artist he can, but his apparent plagiarism is ruined by some unbelievably muddy colouring by the normally brilliant Paul Mounts which, instead of ruining this comic, actually makes it more readable.

The Verdict: I won't be going back to** 10th Muse**, but if you put your tongue in your cheek and pretend you're Dorothy from** The Wizard of Oz**, then this might be a good antidote to Crossgen Comics. (DRB)

Terry Moore's Paradise Too! #3
Abstract Studios
By Terry Moore

The third issue of Moore's sketchbook comic delivers belly laughs about the 2000 US Presidential election, among the usual fascinating insights into the mind - and drawing board - of the man behind **Strangers in Paradise**.



Morris loved to drink from the toilet but the blackouts were hell.

It's a book for dipping into a little at a time, rather than reading cover to cover - and sometimes it can be hit or miss.

The Verdict: If a collection is on the way, it'll be a good buy. (MS)

Thor #42
Marvel
By Dan Jurgens and Stuart Immonen

If the thought of those high-falutin' hippies from Asgard poncing about in tights turns you off, nothing in this review is going to make you want to read this title.

Thor #42 is full of exactly that type of character, doing exactly the type of thing those characters do - fight hard, celebrate hard, and agonize about fallen comrades (Odin, in this case).

What recommends this title, at the moment, is the gorgeous artwork by Immonen and Koblish. Those high-falutin' hippies have rarely looked better. The sad part is that Immonen is leaving shortly, to be replaced by this issue's cover artist, Tom Raney. Will he rise to the challenge?

The Verdict: Sumptuous. (MS)

Thor: Godstorm #1
Marvel
By Kurt Busiek and Steve Rude

This is the big one! Lightning-lashed lavishness in the mighty Marvel manner! A tempestuous tale of the Thunder God as only Stan Lee and Jack Kirby... uh, Kurt Busiek and Steve Rude can deliver it! Hold onto your hats, true believers - unless you want them blown off!

Yup. Busiek and Rude are on a nostalgia kick - and it works. Could it be that the batty Bullpen is longing for the simpler days, when villains were full of mischief rather than murder, and you didn't need a degree in comics history to understand the plot?

The retro feel is enhanced by Rude's adherence to sixties-style page layouts – mostly four- or six-panel grids; but let down by the modern prestige-item look of the cover.

The Verdict: Electrifying. (MS)

HEAR ME, GODS OF FAR ASGARD! HEAR ME, THOR! HEAR ME, TYR AND HEIMDALL! WE CALL ON YOU, NOT FOR AID, FOR OUR STRENGTH IS OUR OWN!
WE CALL ON YOU MERELY TO TAKE NOTICE--TO SEE THAT WE ARE NORTHMEN, WORTHY OF YOU! SEE HOW WE FIGHT, THOR! SEE NOW WE DIE!
8

Thunderbolts #57
Marvel
By Fabian Nicieza and Patrick Zircher

Last issue, Graviton wiped out half of the book's regular cast with little more than a flick of his wrist; this time round, it's down to the surviving members of the team to decide whether or not to risk their government pardons (dependent on the former villains staying out of costume and not using their powers) in an attempt to defeat him. Rallied to the cause by the secretly-Baron-Zemo-in-disguise Citizen V, the frankly schizophrenic Techno gets to choose sides again, while Moonstone learns the hard way that, of course, none of her team-mates are stupid enough to trust her one way or the other.

It's another fine issue walking the tightrope between good and evil, and the choices people make when the chips are down. Here, as throughout this superb series, you never quite know whose side the multi-layered cast are going to come down on, and it's that element of keeping the readers constantly on our toes that makes this whole romp so hugely enjoyable.

The Verdict: An unrepentant Nazi as the saviour of the world? Only this book would have the balls to attempt such a storyline, let alone the skill to pull it off. (JC)

Tomb Raider #½
Top Cow
By Dan Jurgens and Michael Lopez

Vacuous.

The Verdict: Spend your money on something more worthwhile, like a dead rat enema or having your nipples bitten off by rabid tree frogs. (DRB)

Transmetropolitan #50
Vertigo
By Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson

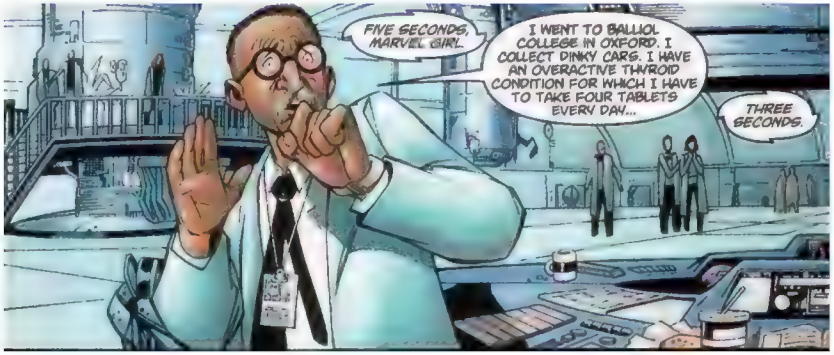
Click on Globe returns to contents

Most comics celebrate their 50th issue with some sort of cover enhancement, or a double-sized issue with pin-ups and all manner of exuberant hoo-hah.

Transmetropolitan chooses to do none of those things, concentrating instead on bringing most of the existing threads together and setting the story up for its final year of publication. A refreshing change, but it'll never catch on.

This month, Spider beats a confession out of Fred Christ, who spills blood and plot points equally. This issue leaves you feeling like *Babylon 5* fans did halfway through season two; you'd like to think you've been paying attention, but you're getting the distinct feeling you haven't been paying attention closely enough, and the intelligent, sophisticated plotline is far deeper than you could have thought and that's why Ellis is writing the comics and we're just reading them. If that's to make it sound like a bad thing - it's not: a comic I previously enjoyed, I now admire.

The Verdict: A celebratory issue that leaves you with new respect for the previous 49 issues, and an urge to reread the whole run before it's even finished. A rare thing. (AC)


FIVE SECONDS, MARVEL GIRL.
I WENT TO BALLIOL COLLEGE IN OXFORD. I COLLECT DINKY CARS. I HAVE AN OVERACTIVE THYROID CONDITION FOR WHICH I HAVE TO TAKE FOUR TABLETS EVERY DAY...
THREE SECONDS.

Ultimate X-Men #10

Marvel

By Mark Millar and Adam Kubert

The pivotal moment here comes when Jean Grey is forced to choose between murdering a scientist who had been developing a genetic weapon - at the behest of Colonel Wraith, leader of Weapon X - or watching Wraith detonate a sub-cranial device in Cyclops' head.

The consequences of this, for Jean, must be devastating. We are reminded of those consequences by the scientist's summation of his life, listing the things that most matter to him in an attempt to persuade Jean not to finish him.

Hopefully Millar will take time to deal with these consequences in future stories, rather than pressing the reset button at the end of this arc.

Also brilliant is the build-up when Colossus tries to reassure Iceman that Wolverine is coming to tear Weapon X apart in order to rescue the X-Men - and then the soldiers drag in Wolverine's heavily napalmed body.

Best of all is the final revelation - but if you want to know what it is, you'll have to buy it and read it for yourselves!

The Verdict: This is how all superhero comics should be written. (MS)

Uncanny X-Men #398

Marvel

By Joe Casey and Sean Phillips

The X-Men achieve their goal of recruiting Chamber, helped by Sugar Kane's betrayal, and Wolverine nixes the threat of Mister Clean with help from a zippo lighter.

What hinders this book greatly is the grotesque, scratchy artwork by Phillips and Wood. The change of style between the first episode of *Poptopia* and the last is jarring.

The Verdict: Of all the X-books, this is the one that's struggling - if something with as huge a following as** Uncanny X-Men **can ever be said to be struggling. (MS)

Wonder Woman #174

DC

By Phil Jiminez and various inkers

After the obligatory *Our Worlds At War* crossover issues, we're back on more familiar ground as the Amazons try to accept the destruction of Paradise Island and Wonder Woman grieves for her mother. Meanwhile, across the seas, an old adversary of Diana's creates havoc by transforming male heroes into animals for other villainesses to hunt, in a lead-in to yet another crossover issue.

Jiminez has done a fine job in restoring a heart to Wonder Woman's stories and his characterizations ring true, while his artwork has a grace and intricacy that adds to the overall quality. However, the one thing lacking is a sense of direction. Yes, this is the best work on the title for years but where is it all heading?

The Verdict: Finely crafted art and script result in an issue let down by its own hollowness. (NL)

X-Force #120

Marvel

By Pete Milligan and Mike Allred

With their "superheroes as pop stars" ethos, Milligan and Allred's reinvigoration of this title continues with such consummate skill that if it were not for the amusingly whiny comments in the letters column it would be easy to forget what an incredibly bad comic this used to be.

This issue sees Wolverine on the cover. But this doesn't mean a pause in the plot for a fill in tale and some pointless hero versus hero hi-jinks. Nope, the story continues apace, as the Coach attempts to deal with X-Force's troublesome leader, the Orphan. The death toll remains high (keeping the average above one lead character killed per issue) but Milligan still manages to pull off a genuine surprise (well, I wasn't expecting it) underlining once again that nothing about this title is certain and that no character is 100 per cent safe.

While Mike Allred's art style might not be to everyone's taste there is no denying that his pop art aesthetic is well suited to a comic that is pure pop culture and an x-soap worthy of the description.

The Verdict: Milligan and Allred do it again. This is the best of the X-titles. (RC) BL

NET VERDICT

Bamdad's Maths Comics
www.csun.edu/~hcmth014/comics.html
This collection of maths-related comics displayed for "enjoyment and educational use" proves that, for some, the words "get", "a", and "life" don't form part of the same sentence. Invaluable, however, for those maths teachers who were not as smart as mine…he gave up and joined our poker school. Oh, all right, some of the cartoons are at least amusing.
The Verdict: Who said collecting belly button fluff was time wasting? (DM)

The Belfry: Furry Comics Online
www.belfry.com/comics.html
Yes, it's another of those "collected cartoons under a theme" sites, though quite why anyone would want to visit a site dedicated to furry animals is beyond me. All your faves are here – **Dokie the Dog**, **Dust Bunnies**, **Meow!** and more obscure stuff like **Garfield** (some kind of fat cat, apparently). And here was me thinking that it had something to do with golf!
The Verdict: The streets are a lot safer now this man spends time with his website. (DM)

Comics From Russia
eIIEEOU AIN AAOAE E IA OIIOEI
www.kulichki.com/comics/index.htm
I'm not entirely sure if the last bit is part of the title (in Russian) or just some computer language mince spawned by a bad Internet connection. No matter, it's all in Russian anyway as you play Russian roulette with the menus and see just what graphics you can conjure up. A few beers, a good Chardonnay, and it's as good as playing charades. Invite friends.
The Verdict: One more reason to regret bunking off from those exciting Russian lessons. (DM)

DC Comics
www.dccomics.com
A return visit after quite some time sees the official DC site in a state of good health. Nicely designed, easy to navigate, full of content, the only down side was the amount of (spit!) loading required. With links to all their subsidiaries - Vertigo, Wildstorm et al. - there's plenty to keep one amused, however. And, in Sneak Peaks I finally found the source of all those nice preview graphics that online magazine editors appeared to pull from nowhere to tease us. Your secret's safe with me, Phil.
The Verdict: Everything you'd want from a major player's site and more. (DM)

Down the Tubes: A Writing for Comics Guide
www.jfree.dircon.co.uk/comics/index.html
This site is devoted, as one might expect, to providing advice on writing comics at a professional level. It is updated at fairly regular intervals. The main piece is very in-depth, covering anything from original graphic novels to syndicated newspaper strips and everything in-between. Despite this level of detail, the advice is written in an informal and very accessible style. Unlike the writers of many "advice" books and websites, the writer John Freeman claims to have had writing experience with *successful* comics companies, so the advice given is most likely good advice.

The only real problem with this site is that although in-depth, the main piece is not particularly long. There are links to other related pieces, however, and this page is a small part of a larger home page where other, albeit less direct information, can be found.
The Verdict: An attractive site, very useful to the wannabe comics writer. (KG)

Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex
www.blueneptune.com/~svw/superman.html
Science fiction author Larry Niven's essay on the scientific basis of Superman. This site does nothing but represent this essay in electronic form, but it is fascinating and amusing reading, all the same.

Written as a joke at the expense of Superman, his writers and readers, and those people who pick holes in films and comics on the basis on "scientific accuracy", this is a wonderful little piece.
The Verdict: Not much in the way of content, but an excellent way to spend a couple of minutes. (KG)

Warren Ellis Takes On Miracleman. On Drugs.
www.cs.oberlin.edu/~abayer/mm_review.html
Hot comics writer Warren Ellis reviewed issues #1 to #16 of the legendary "Miracleman" for his Delphi forum (*http://forums.delphi.com/ellis/start*), and his thoughts are presented on this page.

Apparently part of a larger site, there is no evidence of any other

content apart from this particular page. However, this is not too much of a problem, since what is presented here is very interesting indeed. Presented after the main essay are some further notes by Ellis and comics columnist and **Borderline** contributor Rich Johnston, expanding on the details of the main piece.

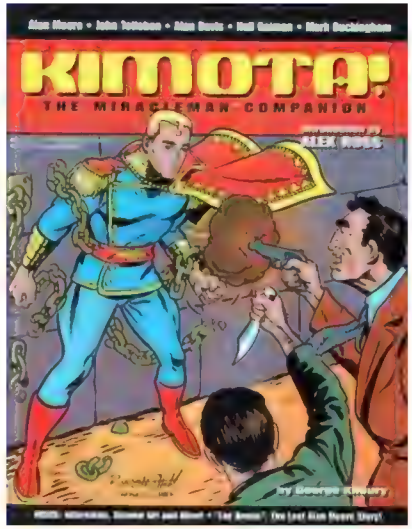
As one might expect, the thoughts here are intelligent and occasionally extreme. It is fascinating to see comics auteur Warren Ellis take on comics legend Alan Moore, and it is also very interesting to see a not wholly complimentary review of a title which is generally considered to be a masterpiece.
The Verdict: Interesting on many levels, and certainly worth spending a spare minute to have a look. (KG)

Rocket Raccoon
www.iag.net/~lamar/ROCKET_RACCOON/
Rocket Raccoon was one of Marvel's mid-80s experiments - a non-Marvel Universe science-fiction saga involving cute talking animals battling for control of biscuit and toy factories. The premise of the series was about as far-out as anything could be, but the execution was wonderful, proving that the 80s weren't all bad for Marvel. UK readers may have encountered *Rocket Raccoon* as one of the earliest (and best) of the back-up strips in Marvel UK's **Transformers**.

This attractive site is devoted to this four-issue oddity, and presents a great deal of information for the nostalgic comics fan to enjoy. The amount of information that is presented is unfortunately limited to the actual length of the original series, but what information there is here is for the most part in-depth and well written. Unfortunately, a page detailing the creators of this strangeness is absent due to the actions of mischievous computer hackers, but it is hoped that this will soon be remedied. The images are surprisingly clean and detailed, considering the age of the series, and effectively convey the overworking imaginations that created the title, as well as arousing lots of warm and fuzzy nostalgic feelings in this viewer!
The Verdict: This must be visited, if only to see one of the strangest and best concepts in mainstream comics! (KG)

Want your website reviewed? Send the URL to our reviews address and be sure to give some extra details.

THE VERDICT ROUND TABLE



Kimota!
Tomorrows Publishing
George Khoury

Martin Shipp:
THIS is a book crammed with lovely things, and the best of these is on page three, under the heading "Trademarks And Copyrights". It begins: "Based on information contained herein, the publisher believes..."

TwoMorrows have been making something of an impression in the last few years, what with *Comic Book Artist* and *Comicology* covering recent comics history and modern comics personalities respectively, and the more specialist *Alter Ego, Jack Kirby Collector* and *Draw!* covering their subjects more than adequately. **Kimota!** is a paperback book in magazine size, nearly a hundred and fifty pages of it, all dedicated to one character. We British know this character as Marvelman, the rest of the world as Miracleman. **Kimota!** attempts to tell the story of the character since his resurrection by Dez Skinn, Alan Moore and Garry Leach, taking in the convoluted story of who owns exactly how much of what copyright on which name, and throws in a wealth of extra goodies as a bonus.

There are fascinating interviews with near enough everybody who was involved in the **Marvelman/ Miracleman** series at any time, from Moore through to Cat Yronwode; even Neil Gaiman comes across as less of a ponce than usual.

The trouble with the book is that its writer, George Khoury, takes an uncritical line with both the character and its creators. Most of the interviews contradict each other, and Khoury hasn't cross-referenced or cross-examined any of his interviewees. In the end, the reader has to try to straighten out the various tales himself and ultimately winds up none the wiser. This may be owing to the fact that **Kimota!** was originally to be a self-published effort by Khoury - it had been advertised as such in TwoMorrows publications some time ago - and his love for MM blinds him to the inherent flaws in both character and creator.

Kimota! could have used a decent proofreader with some knowledge of British comics, as there are some unforgivable mistakes in a book that lays claim to being a definitive account. And if you don't have a rough working knowledge of the British newsstand distribution system you'll be confused as an adder in a haybarn by some of the interviews. After reading it, I'm still none the wiser about who owns what, or about what happened with Eclipse, but I've read a nice new Moore/ Totleben story which sadly has bugger all to do with Marvel/Miracleman, I've understood a joke that passed unnoticed when I first read the series and I know why Chuck Beckum changed his name to Austen. Whether that knowledge is worth a tenner in your English money is debatable.

Nice package, slightly disappointing contents. Girls, you know the feeling.

Mike Sivier:
Yes, on the face of it this is a very attractive book: coffee table-sized, lavish illustrations, input from everyone involved - creatively - in Marvelman/Miracleman.

The problem is, in light of last month's news concerning Neil Gaiman and Marvel Comics, it looks like it will be of more interest as a historical document than as a definitive final word.

As a MM fanboy since the very first issue of **Warrior**, it was fascinating for me to read Alan Moore's original proposal for the series, the opinions of the creators - including both Moore and Gaiman - and pages of artwork from the never-published issue 25.

But the trouble with MM these days is that, no matter how fantastic the stories have been, they have become overshadowed by the legal wrangles over ownership of the character.

The long-running uncertainty over the fate of MM as a property has led to more than a little ill-feeling among the interested parties, and this comes out strongly in a book that concentrates on the reinvention of MM for **Warrior** and, later, his own American comic in the 1980s.

It is sad that this book was published before Gaiman teamed up with Marvel to announce that he has formed a company to sort out the ownership issue once and for all, funded with the profits from his new mini-series, to be published by Marvel.

Marvel wants its man, and the company is prepared to fund a legal war to get him.

What does that mean for this book? Not a lot - now - although it is interesting to speculate on what it could have meant, if it had been written a year later!

Nigel Lowrey:
Eight years after the series was last published and on the eve of the character's imminent return comes this 140+ page book covering the Marvelman/Miracleman story. The series has engendered a huge amount of interest due to its long and legally entangled history, possibly because it is the only major work by Alan Moore from that period not readily available. Khoury has done his best to provide as extensive a guide as possible, as well as interviews of various lengths with all of the main creators and editors, going as far back as Mick Anglo. There is an index, the script to the first Alan Moore story, unpublished artwork, a cover gallery and more to digest. It comes close to being as perfect a reference source as possible, but for two things...the first is that by the nature of the beast, reading over 100 pages covering the same ground becomes wearing and results in a hard slog of a read. The second problem is that no effort is made to actually address the work itself...no critique, overview or anything. A newcomer to the series would find out about all the behind the scenes shenanigans but come away from this with no greater insight into the actual subject matter.

Worthy and of value, but only for hardcore fans and comic historians.

D.R. Booth:
Worthy? I'm not so sure. Despite a semi-well-known, one-time successful UK publisher doing everything in his power to keep this anachronism in the public eye, I get the impression that this "companion" is not much more than a waste of a forest and a lot of ink. Does anyone, apart from a handful of people, really want a 148-page diatribe on a character and comic that wasn't even very successful? It doesn't even make particularly interesting reading, yet again nothing is resolved, and I got the impression that George Khoury was probably the only person who really enjoyed doing it - even the rare and unseen stuff was let down by shoddy packaging and production values. For $12.95 you can just about pick up all 25 issues of **Miracleman** from cheap back issue sellers - you may or may not be impressed, but either way you'll get a story and not a load of acrimonious bollocks. BL

COLLECTED VERDICT

Couscous Express
AiT/Planetlar
By Brian Wood and Brett Weldele

Olive Yassin delivers food from her parents' Middle Eastern restaurant (the Couscous Express of the title), but hates both the job and her parents. Her boyfriend, Moustafa, is a mercenary courier, and she loves him but hates his female partner, Special. When the Turkish mafia threatens her parents, the stage is set for a showdown of revelations, gunfire and love and loyalty.

Wood's script is incredible, able to delineate character effortlessly through brief dialogue and interaction, and he knows when to leave a panel silent, which is a rare gift in comics these days. To have so many believable characters stay in the mind after only an 88-page story is an achievement, at least half of which has to be laid at the door of artist Brett Weldele.

His work has the frantic scribbling of early Jamie Hewlett, but tempered with the stylish zip-a-toning of Matt Wagner. It can hit you in the face, and then whisper to you quietly. Then it can hit you in the face again.

This is, at its heart, a morality tale, dealing with the eternal themes of angst and alienation as teenage ennui gives way - as it always must - to the mature friendships and compromises of adulthood. It's none the worse for that; in fact this may well be the best comic portrayal of the theme I've read. It handles the teenage and 20-something cast with sympathy, making them live and breathe realistically without reverting to stereotypes.

The Verdict: It reads beautifully and looks wonderful; the characters feel just right and the pace is tight, with a fine - if unavoidable - finish. There's really nothing to fault here. (AC)

Footsoldiers: Volumes 1 & 2
AiT/PlanetLar
1: By Jim Krueger and Mike Oeming
2: By Jim Krueger, Phil Hester and Bill Sienkiewicz

Despite uncertainty about superheroes, my interest in these compilations had been piqued by the **Earth X** (Krueger) and **Powers** (Oeming) connections - two finer examples of the genre.

Devised by Jim Krueger and with Volume One drawn by Mike Oeming, this is the tale of a post-superhero world where the heroes have mysteriously died off. It's not unlike the future world in *Terminator*, governed by robot police beetles (BTLs).

Three boys are encouraged (or led?) to discover the ancient superhero graveyard, and new heroes are born as a result of their actions. With their powers come new dangers and new responsibilities. Before long they are joined by a renegade BTL and a brick

THE CLASSIC TPBK REVIEW

Miracleman: The Golden Age
Eclipse
By Neil Gaiman and Mark Buckingham

Possibly the greatest comic no-one has ever read, **Miracleman** is the story that more than any other redefined the superhero genre in the 1980s and, along the way, earned Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman their well-deserved reputations as comics' premier auteurs.

Since **Miracleman**'s publisher, Eclipse, went bankrupt in 1993 these tales have been criminally out of print and, with an ongoing dispute between Neil Gaiman (the series' last regular writer) and Todd McFarlane (who bought Eclipse at their bankruptcy sale) about who owns what, are likely to remain that way. This is a shame because, aside from Moore's achievements in taking a cheap Captain Marvel rip-off and reinventing him as a Zarathustrian Übermensch, **Miracleman** also consists of some of Gaiman's finest work.

Gaiman and Buckingham's work on the title, collected here, follows on immediately from Moore's celebrated run. His enemies defeated, Miracleman has reinvented our flawed, imperfect world in his own (and one suspects, Alan Moore's) image. He has built a utopia on earth. Where could it go from here?

Collected from the first six issues of Gaiman's run, the nine stories show a remarkable change in pace and political sentiment from Moore's anarchist paradise.

Shifting the focus away from Miracleman, Gaiman instead focuses on the inhabitants of this brave new world, the mortals who inhabit a realm where gods walk among them. Their tales are of human frailties that persist into the age of miracles, and Gaiman captures those frailties well, distilling them into tangible moments.

The stories here tell of recently dead celebrities brought back to life, of spies coming in from the cold and of pilgrims seeking to pray to Miracleman, the new god of their world. Buckingham's art adapts to each story, allowing him to demonstrate a broader range of styles than usual - from pop art, to caricature, to children's storybook.

Newcomers might miss some of the subtexts and nuances of the tales that are tied up in Miracleman's continuity, but such knowledge is not necessary. New readers will appreciate the tales for their complete stand-alone qualities, while regular readers will enjoy the subtle references that flesh out Miracleman's world.

With McFarlane set to release his own version of Miracleman in the coming months I can only hope that people will seek out the original stories in the back issue bins to find out for themselves what made Miracleman such an unmissable comic.

The Verdict: Some of the best work Neil Gaiman and Mark Buckingham have ever produced. If you can track down the trade or any of the back issues then it's well worth your time and money. (RC)

wall(!). But their effect on the people around them is startling. When one of the three is mortally wounded, the citizens he has helped pay back his earlier kindness.

If Volume One acts as a "secret origin", Volume Two moves on to explore the pitfalls that our heroes encounter. Tensions arise between them because of the manipulations of Mr Lion, the trickster who was freed by their actions in the superhero graveyard.

One of the three, Story, is hiding the fact that he can read, both because he feels such intellectual pursuits will be attacked, and because in keeping that talent from his colleagues he failed to stop the menace of Mr Lion before it had begun. It seems that Mr Lion, evidently the villain of **Footsoldiers**, was somehow involved in the destruction of the earlier generation of superheroes and in the establishment of the oppressive regime upheld by the Beetles.

Volume One reprinted the Dark Horse issues; the series was then relocated to Image and the first of those issues appear in Volume Two. There are more volumes to come, with art by Steve Yeowell in the next.
The Verdict: Welcome collections for a consistently excellent series, full of good storytelling, lovely art and clever ideas. (AB)

Who's Laughing Now?
Slave Labor Graphics
By Evan Dorkin

Evan Dorkin wants to make us laugh. In fact, the manic kinetic energy in his artwork, coupled with his refusal to settle for the "one-joke-a-panel" routine, suggests that he's desperate to make us crack up, and if he thinks a joke isn't as funny as it should be, he's not averse to apologizing for it as well.

Which he doesn't do very often. **Dork** is a very funny comic, and so, by extension, is this compilation of strips from the first five issues. The *Eltingville* strips and *Milk and Cheese* have been pushed aside as they're being collected separately, but this means the idiosyncratic strips collected here don't get overshadowed by Dorkin's more well known brands.

The book plays host to the first appearance of the wonderfully pithy Devil Puppet who, on editing the letters page, bails out after three panels with the exclamation "Who wants to hear this cow tripe. So ends the letters page." We need more critics like him.

The equally inspired Fisher Price adaptations of classic novels also make their first appearances in this book. The adaptation of **The Catcher In The Rye** goes on a bit too long but the three panel versions of **The Secret History** and **Generation X** are wonderfully succinct.

But the fun strips are my favourite part of **Dork**, and this book is overflowing with them. Three panels to a strip, seven strips to a page, and there are 19 pages of them. There are the recurring adventures of Myron The Living Voodoo Doll, basically the same strip every time but it's a damn funny one, and a similar sentiment applies to Phil The Disco Skinhead. There are strips about subjects that we shouldn't be laughing at – Princess Di In Heaven and Thomas The Tanked Engine - and if one of the strips doesn't make you laugh, well, there's another one coming right along. It's the machine gun comedy assault of this section which ensures that, pound for pound, **Dork** is the funniest comicbook on the market today.
The Verdict : Manic, misanthropic, inspired lunacy. (SM) BL

ZINE SEEN

Dork Tower #14
Dork Storm Press
By John Kovalic

The popularity of gaming comics is on the rise, and when they're as good as this it's not hard to see why. On the surface, this is a comic about roleplaying, sci-fi, comics, computing, and other areas of geekdom, poking fun at them in the way that only someone who knows and loves them can. Past issues have made fun of *Star Wars*, *Babylon 5*, **Danger Girl** and, of course, *Pokemon*, but this issue is mainly concerned with the ongoing romantic plot between Matt and Gilly, two characters who are perfect for each other, the only problem being that they've never actually met.

The previous issue seemingly brought them together at last but, unfortunately, Matt is so hung over that he can't remember.

This "will they, won't they" plot has kept readers hooked for months, but that wouldn't matter if the comic wasn't funny. Thankfully, though, it *is* funny, due to its wonderful, memorable characters. Kovalic has a bold, attractive cartoon style, and is ably assisted by quality back-up strips. Extra value for money is added by the inclusion of a free board game.

This is perhaps not the best issue for first time buyers - for the full impact of Matt and Gilly's relationship you should read some previous issues first. And, after last issue's cliffhanger, anything was going to be a slight disappointment. But this is still a well- written, well-drawn, hilariously funny (and occasionally painfully accurate) comic, which I heartily recommend.
The Verdict: Still the funniest comic I've ever read, and for a humour title what could be a better recommendation? (CS)

Eyeball on Windshield
£2 from Smallzone, 10 Cleveland Avenue, High Ercoll, Telford, Shropshire, TF6 6AH

Sinuous markings make negative shapes by way of a dense radiograph use of crosshatch and cross-space. With a painted half Ping-Pong ball on the cover is Malcy Duff's tale of life, love and living with a corpse (and travelling community of insects).

The story doesn't so much as unfold, rather relies on reader-viewer interpretation, pushing to the brink an interpretation of Malcy's impeccably in use lineguage. The drawing style is one that is of distinguishing pedigree, yet despite it's proportional challenge (for space) slips into camouflage set against the content of linear flashed with oddity and eccentricity. In ways is Malcy's work similar with that of Jim Woodring: in ways it is not. It contains an "out of time" quality, distortions of scale, dimension crossing and mumble panels. And that Duff revels in abstraction and gives the reader/viewer a leeway in between panels any cartoonist sequencers just can't seem to manage.

Existence of a "working copy" appears to be in evidence which allows Malcy to make best use of his time budget (view the comic for details) and allows for extensive use and reformation of single establishing shots for the purposes of, say, background. The comic's flaw (and it is a necessary one) is that the visual language (lineguage) is at times impenetrable, causing me no end of fury! Indeed, is this his goal? To ensure I look at the pages again when I am ready. A very real chart of interconnected humour building, like a screwed-up pre-school choir.
The Verdict: This comic blows the guts out of any doubts I had about his abilities as a cartoonist, and gives a new success not only to Malcy's portfolio but also to comics. (AL)

Heads #1
50p from FK Comics, 4 Brabham Close, Chorlton-Cum-Hardy, Manchester M21 9GP

A simple concept - this comic is based around the idea of some friends meeting in a pub and having a chat. There's really nothing more to it than that, but it makes for a surprisingly entertaining comic, and a very well observed one. For the majority of the issue this is played for laughs, with the characters drinking the day away, making increasingly ludicrous orders at the bar, insulting each other and talking about the sort of things which drunk blokes talk about. However, tucked in amongst the general humour there are some accurate, recognizable moments, from the mounting horror when you go to bed only to realize it's already getting light, to those tiny moments when the characters realize that maybe they're wasting their lives simply drinking them away.

These neat little observations improve an already enjoyable comic. The art is simple, but the scenario doesn't call for detail - what's more important is the dialogue, which is very good indeed.
The Verdict: Enjoyable, and at times worryingly familiar. (CS)

Jeremy Dennis: The Weekly Strip
£1 from 18 Hawkins Street, Oxford, OX14 1YD, or visit www.alleged.demon.co.uk/jrd/tws-2001.html

This is a collection of ten single page stories by Jeremy Dennis, taken from her weekly-updated website. The extremist absurdist, the pleasant quirkiness, Jeremy Dennis and her works are those things. A few mentions of examples?

Nothing Happened, the tale of "the obscurest cartoonist of them all", is a fine work. The form of introspection coupled with bleak humour and resonating narrative structure is generously lacking in dilution. Jeremy uses her tools to display all the things that are worth it about this life. Even her comics about comics avoid the anal and are only positive and upbeat. Jeremy Dennis once again finds the auburn fluffy toy in a world of metallic hum and artificial weather.

The Verdict: Jeremy Dennis – neat! (AL)

Old Newts #1
£1 from Happy Bunny Comics, 39 Lower Unwin Street, Penistone, Sheffield S36 6LX

This is the first issue in a series of reprints showcasing Richard J. Smith's early *Rabid J. Newt* strips, which originally appeared in a variety of fanzines. It features two stories, the first of which sees Rabid helping test some weird inventions in a haunted wood, while the second is a **Power Rangers** parody. Both of these strips are at least five years old, and Smith's artistic and storytelling skills have developed since then, as evidenced in his ongoing **Cheronna** series. However, his art, even then, had an infectious energy, and the humour contains many more hits than misses.

The first story doesn't quite seem to flow, but the second is much better, and both have good punchlines. For fans of Smith's current work, this is an interesting curio, giving an insight into how his comics have developed. For everyone else, this a good introduction to his material. Either way, it's a decent dose of energetic fun.

The Verdict: A good early work by one of my favourite small-press creators. Get it. (CS)

Paper Theater
Alternative Comics
By Ben Catmull

These days $5.00 will usually get you an overpriced and over-packaged piece of tat from Marvel or DC featuring run of the mill stories that should, by rights, appear in their respective monthly titles, if at all (**Batman: Outlaws** being a prime offender). Here, your hard-earned will get you 64 pages of quality black and white strips, printed in a 8" by 11" album format with a very attractive and pleasantly tactile matt finished colour cover.

This collection - funded by Peter Laird's Xeric Foundation (proving that at least one person used their *Ninja Turtles* profits wisely) - features an assortment of styles from the surreal to the poignant, from comedy to satire. Catmull varies his art style very slightly to match the tone of each tale, but his basic style seems to be to draw in bold swathes of black ink, setting up outlines and shadows out of which he then scratches details with a blade. It is an effective and unique style, adding a macabre, woodcut feel to his work.

Both *Emily* and *Summer Camp* are written as bittersweet reminiscences, snapshots of a larger tale; *Evening Walk* is a one-gag story with a wonderful Maurice Sendak quality to it; and *An Illustrated Depiction of the 273rd Day of Interstellar Bathysphere 12* is a very wry and amusing portrayal of the Victorian gentleman in space.

The Taxidermist is told in a looser, quite beautifully inked style and wonderfully describes the recalcitrance of inanimate objects by endowing them with little arms and legs, explaining why things never do as you'd wish or are never where you left them.

In *Jeff Goes to the Store* Catmull gleefully abandons the constraints of his art to offer the story of a particularly mean-spirited man, told in a frenzy of loose ink somewhere between a Picasso sketch and a John Lennon cartoon.

If **Paper Theater** is any indication, Ben Catmull is a name to watch for - let's hope that this showcase is successful enough that it will offer him the opportunity to continue working in the field.

The Verdict: The range presented here, both in the writing and the art, shows tremendous promise; the writing is unpretentious and honest, showing real wit and insight; the art is attractive and confident; and all of these qualities are utilized to their full potential, depending on the tone of the story. A remarkable debut. (AC)

I Know God Smiles On These Good Times
Sequential Publications
By Paul Hornschemeier

Sometimes a comic comes along about which so much should be said, and yet words will always fail to do it justice.

I Know God Smiles on These Good Times is not a "proper" comic, nor a short story, but something new and beautiful. Each page has a

Comic Book #1-3
Tax Man
The Exec #1
Comics Conspiracy
By Doug Myers and various artists
Information from www.comicsconspiracy.com

For some unaccountable reason aspiring comics writer Doug Myers kept getting knocked back by companies such as Marvel every time he sent them a sample script. Undaunted and clearly not short of what we Scots call a "good conceit of himself", Mr. Myers set out making his own. After his earlier rejections he set up a comics store, Comics Conspiracy, before finally embarking on the self-publishing road. By this time he'd sold the shop and gone into web design, allowing him the income required to fund his real first love.

So, is it worth it? Judging from this sampler package, Doug is not entirely without talent. The stories are quirky, with a wry humour. **Comic Book** combines Peter Parker with Superman to provide the lead character, an unnamed superhero who lives with his mum and works at a newspaper. He gets into all sorts of scrapes, winning or losing more through luck than design. I doubt many heroes delay saving the universe while keeping a taximeter running, for example. Meanwhile, the sly digs at the comic speculator breed are amusing, if easy.

In **Tax Man** and **The Exec**, set in the future, both characters dispense fiscal duties in the style of *Dirty Harry*, with opponents and their innards liberally spattered across the pages. The art, supplied by Studio 3 illustrators and colourists, is okay. That's the plus side. On the down, there's something that doesn't quite hang together in Myers' writing. A good piece of dialogue is just as likely to be followed by something stilted or cheesy, breaking up the flow. The flaws the big boy editors spotted before sending off those impersonal rejection slips are clear enough.

Although Myers has enjoyed some small successes (working on **Vamperotica** and the **Avengelyne: St.Peter's Gate** mini-series), his conceit is often off-putting. "I did a beautiful one-shot which boasted one of the best scripts I've ever written," he states in **Tax Man**'s editorial, going on to add: "I know (**Tax Man**) is as good or better than anything in the independent market". Er, well, it's not. It's not total garbage but neither is it **Strangehaven** or **Cerebus**. No matter, I'm sure many of us would follow Doug's path if we had just a bit more cash and got off our arses to fulfil our creative dreams.

The Verdict: Not bad, but don't tell Doug. He believes it's far more special than that. (DM)

picture with a block of text, although some pages only have one or the other. These words and pictures tell different stories, without any obvious connection; yet the pictures tend to resonate with the text, and the text tends to reference the pictures, in ways that will stay in your mind for long after the final page. You will read this more than once, and find different things to admire each time.

Everything that needs to be said about **I Know God Smiles on These Good Times** is contained within its own pages. If you like good short fiction, or don't mind working at your entertainment, or even just have an interest in the innovation and progress of comic narrative, then this will reward you.
The Verdict: A comic that is wonderful and haunting, at once sad and uplifting and unlike anything else in both intent and format. (AC)

True Story, Swear to God #1
Clib's Boy Comics
By Tom Beland

This is the true story (surprise, surprise) of how creator Tom Beland met his one true love Lily at the Magical Kingdom (by which we are to assume he means Disneyworld, although it's never stated, oddly enough).

There's a massive 40 pages of story here for your $2.95, which, even for a black-and-white comic, is tremendous value for money. And it's a sweet sort of a tale, obviously with a romantic tint to it, but none the worse for that.

Beland's art has an easy simplicity reminiscent of John Kricfalusi's, and he uses it well, fitting a whole weekend packed with incident into his comic. It's amusing, it's sweet, and to say anything too bad about it would be to detract from the sheer, romantic honesty of the thing. If this comic were fictional, I would accuse the ending of being too influenced by the John Cusack movie *Say Anything*, but it's a true story so I can't.

When one guy puts his life on paper like this, it's churlish to criticize; if it's too cute in places, that's because life can be like that, certainly when viewed through the rose-tinted spectacles of a man as much in love as Beland so obviously is.
The Verdict: Great value, romantic and amusing and, above all, heartfelt. You can check out short *True Story, Swear to God* ***stories by emailing Beland at*** tom@yunque.net***. It's free - and tell him*** *Borderline* ***sent you. (AC)***

Violent! #4
£1 from Violent! Comics, 9 Greenacre Road, Whitchurch, Bristol, BS14 0HL

The excellent small press anthology title returns with its best issue yet, and a stunning Frazer Irving cover. The production values have been improved to the point that it is difficult to tell that this is a small press title at all! This issue sees the introduction of new contributors, as well as strips from some of the "regulars", culminating in a very solid overall package with few weak points.

Spare Parts, by Jay Eales, with interesting art from Peet!, looks set to be a very entertaining and intriguing spin on a classic horror tale. If the quality of the first instalment can be carried on through to later episodes, this tale could be a very strong core for this title. *A Killing in Suburbia*, by Mike Sivier and Shaun Bryan, is not likely to be more than a one-off, which is a shame, since the anarchic script and excellent art would suit a series of self-contained episodes set in the same neighbourhood. *Rabid*, a regular series, continues to provide a chilling yet compelling read, while *Mitch Molotov*, another regular strip, lets the side down somewhat with uninspired art and a weak script.

This highlights the main problem that

FILM REVIEW

Ghost World
Rated 15 (UK) R (US), 111 mins
Directed by Terry Zwigoff
Starring Thora Birch, Scarlett Johansson and Steve Buscemi

When a film is based on a popular comic book the audience is usually split into two groups; those that have slavishly read and re-read the comic until it has almost become a religious text, and those who haven't.

Frequently the first of these groups is the most critical, decrying even the smallest changes between film and comic as a betrayal of the highest order. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that the wider audience sees comic fans as weirdo obsessives, but that is beside the point.

Thankfully it had been so long since I last read Dan Clowes' **Ghost** World that, when I went to see it at a special screening at the Raindance Underground and Independent film festival in London, I was able to watch it with relatively fresh eyes. And, maybe because it was part of a film festival, few amongst the audience seemed to be die-hard purist comic fans.

For those unfamiliar with the graphic novel, *Ghost World* follows a summer in the lives of Enid and Rebecca. The Ghost World of the title is that limbo time between graduation from school and the start of "real life" in an alienating modern world. Work, relationships and responsibility are all themes but perhaps the film's most compelling element and the core of the narrative is Enid and her increasingly desperate attempts to move forward without moving on.

Director Terry Zwigoff (director of *Crumb* and close friend of its star, underground cartoonist Robert Crumb) shows an obvious love and knowledge of the medium and should be praised for having kept Clowes involved in writing the screenplay of the film adaptation. The casting is pretty close to perfect with both Thora Birch and Scarlett Johansson bearing a strong resemblance to the comic characters they are portraying. Steve Buscemi is equally suited to the role of Seymour, a geeky, cranky antique vinyl collector who appears to have more than a little in common with Robert Crumb himself. However, despite his generously restrained performance, his presence inevitably draws the emphasis of the film away from the gently disintegrating relationship between Rebecca and Enid that is at the heart of the graphic novel, and into the realms of romantic comedy.

There were some nice in-jokes here too - inevitably fans will be looking for issues of Dan Clowes comic **Eightball** in the 'zine store but the real gem is Enid picking out an old record by Zwigoff and Crumb's old band, the Cheap Suit Serenaders. Unfortunately Seymour dissuades her from playing it.

It was a pity to see some scenes go, such as the supposed satanists shopping for ready meals and the weird psychic astrologist character of Bob Skeetes; and, yes, hours after you have watched the film, when it has percolated into the most fannish corners of your mind, there are certain things that strike you as slightly unsatisfying. But *Ghost World* is a well made coming of age indie film that is not only enjoyable in its own right but is also unaffected by the stigma of comics – something that the other big up coming film adaptation, *From Hell*, looks very unlikely to deliver.

The Verdict: An engaging and intelligent indie movie that is well worth seeing if it's playing in your area. (RC)

this anthology faces right now. There is an uncomfortable feeling of flux, as if the contributors are throwing countless stories at the reader in order to see which ones will stick. Granted, this title is still very young, but it would be nice to see some of these one-offs and short multi-part tales replaced with, or expanded into, something longer and more regular. What this title needs, in short, is a *Judge Dredd* equivalent, to build the other stories around. *Spare Parts* or *Knuckles*, from this issue, would be good candidates for this role, while from previous issues, Jay Eales' *The Flatworm*, Hugh Janus's *The Tallyman* (both strips excellently drawn by Paul Holden), or Simon Fraser's *Aggro* would be ideal.

As it stands, however, this is an excellent title, at the high end of small press production. Every issue so far has been strong, and is well worth reading, even if there has been little in the way of a coherent structure. The art is generally very good, and in places, wonderful, and the scripting (particularly that of Jay Eales) is very strong indeed. Small press titles are rarely better than this, and anthologies, professional or not, are rarely as successful throughout as this little gem.

The Verdict: This title has a great deal of potential, and is always an entertaining read. Get into it now, and see something wonderful in the making! (KG) **BL**

Due to space considerations there is no **Comics Almanack** this month, but to keep up to date with Ade Brown's tips for November check out:
http://members.aol.com/adeheathen/ComicsAlmanack.htm

Music Box #1-3

Cydonia Press

By Donie Odulio

Information from www.cydoniapress.com

"A new publisher, doin' something different" is how Cydonia Press's Donie Odulio describes his comics work, and after sampling the first three chapters of this six issue series, it's difficult not to agree with such a boast.

Music Box is a very strange affair, centring on the relationship between cellist Victoria and Max, a muscle-packed deaf mute who becomes her sort of protector after rescuing her from an attempted rape. So far, so straightforward, you might think. Well, then things start to get a little crazy, with the action regularly jumping from Victoria and Max's world to a Tolkienesque realm of fantasy, full of strange creatures called things like "Feerstang" and "Deimos", who say stuff like, "What evil witchcraft is this?" before kicking the crap out of each other. Clearly the two seemingly separate stories are going to flow into one sooner or later, but at this stage it would take Batman, Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Morse to work out how.

That wouldn't be so bad if both narrative strands were equally captivating, but unfortunately, they aren't. The scenes involving Max and Victoria are fine, Odulio having a good ear for dialogue and building their fledgling friendship realistically and sensitively. However, it usually isn't long before our time with these absorbing characters is abruptly halted and we're carted back off to Dungeons & Dragons World for more crazy scrapes with Feerstang and his mates. It doesn't work, the latter scenes being overlong, over-wordy and, frankly, rather dull. I found myself speed reading through them to get back to Victoria and Max.

Let's not berate Odulio too much, though, as there are moments when his writing really hits the heights. The scene at the beginning of issue #2 in which Victoria is desperately trying to fight off a gang of would-be rapists while, oddly enough, thinking about her parents' vicious divorce is right out of the top drawer. To attempt such a difficult and incongruous combination of words and pictures is brave, to pull it off so well is mature, confident storytelling at its best.

While we're praising Odulio, let's talk about his full-colour painted art, which is truly lovely at times, its subdued, autumnal tones and languorous lines giving it a dreamy, almost ethereal quality. The covers are particularly gorgeous, while issue #3 contains a very clever, but quite sinister riff on Seurat's painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of Grande Jatte*. Again, though, the fantasy scenes aren't as effective art-wise as those set in the world of Victoria and Max, which give the artist a chance to show off his eye for fancy cars, suburban houses and ramshackle buildings.

The Verdict: This may be only half perfect, but** Music Box **is still worth checking out despite its faults. (AW)

COMICS MAGAZINES

The Comics Journal #237 and #238

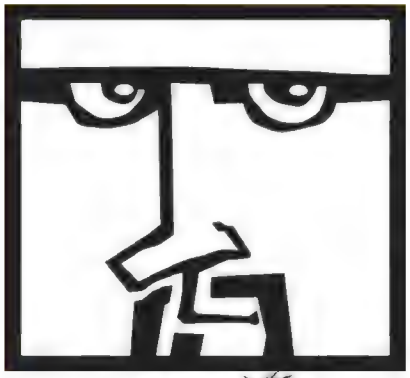
Fantagraphics

The last two issues of TCJ were handed over to guest editors with a wide remit. The draconian hands of Gary Groth and Kim Thompson would not interfere. Mary Fleener and then Jordan Crane could do what they wished with the magazine while the masters prepared for the semi-anthology Winter Special.

Fleener has gone for the themed issue with #237, filling it with features on and interviews with female cartoonists. While a very welcome and definitely superior issue, Fleener doesn't use the opportunity to get outside the Comics Journal box, as it were. It feels like another issue, not helped by the letters and news pages surviving the editorial dictat. The interviews with Ellen Forney, Alison Bechdel and others are excellent but would not be out of place in any other issue. As such, the magazine doesn't live up to the hype. It's just a relatively superior issue.

That said, I read it after reading Tom Devlin's effort on #238. Here the Highwater Books publisher has teamed up with Jordan Crane, editor of the anthology **Non**, and gone all iconoclastic on us. If Fleener's was the women taking over, this is the new kids showing the old gits how it should be done and not giving a damn whether they like it or not. No letters page and the news is shunted to the back. Almost every article is by someone from their gang about stuff they really like. Of note, especially to British readers, is Tom Hart's interview with Glenn Dakin, but there's also articles and reviews by Seth, Steve Weissman, Ron Rege, Greg Cook, James Kochalka, Jef Czekaj and others from the alterative / art comics stable. Their subject matter ranges from the incredibly obscure to the sublime - an appreciation of Moomin creator Tove Jansson is very welcome and Seth's long piece on 60s teen comics creator John Stanley (yup, new to me too) is as much a companion to Seth's comics work as a fascinating historical piece. This issue can been seen as a manifesto for the creators who found their voice in the late 90s and know they're onto something important, not just in creating great comics but in knowing about comics. Viva la revolution, I say.

The Verdict: Fleener does a good job but Crane blows everyone out of the water with TCJ #238. Well worth the cover price and more. This is the future! (PA)



DRAWING BOARD

Secrets from the Artist's portfolio: ***D'Israeli***

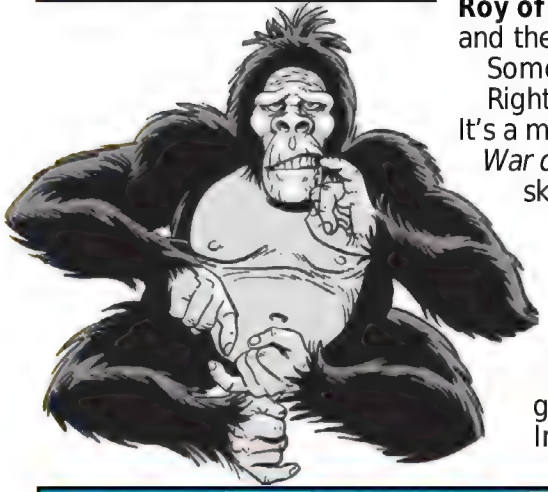
IN THE Paradox **Big Books**, my bios always start like this: "I live in Sheffield with my Mummy and a nice kitty." It's true. I live with my Mum to keep costs down, and the nice kitty is a howling black furry lump called Allen Ginsberg.

That's me.

I became a comic artist because I was driven by a passionate need to make a living without ever having to do a proper job. I've had the bonus of working on stuff people have heard of – inker on **Sandman**, artist on **Batman: No Man's Land**, **Lazarus Churchyard**, work for **2000AD**, **Roy of the Rovers** and **Heavy Metal**, but in the end, what counts is that I get to draw every day, and the damn' fools pay me for it.

Sometimes I'm rich and sometimes I'm poor, but I always laugh all the way to the bank.

Right now, I'm drawing an online graphic novel called **Scarlet Traces**, written by Ian Edginton. It's a murder mystery set in an alternative London in 1901, following the Martian invasion from *The War of the Worlds*. Everything's been rebuilt using Martian technology, so you've got Gaudi skyscrapers and Hansom cabs on legs, and it's such fun! Ian thinks up such cool stuff, he's a joy to work with. **Scarlet Traces** will be on the Coolbeansworld website early next year.

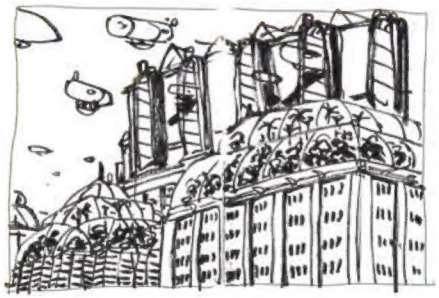


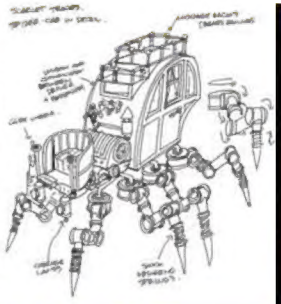
Nowadays I draw almost exclusively on computer, using a drawing tablet and stylus. You just scribble on the tablet with the stylus and the lines appear on screen; it felt weird at first, having your hand move in one place and the lines appear in another, but I'm used to it now. People ask me if I don't miss real ink and paper and pen nibs, and I do, but when I go back to them I miss the Undo command more.

In between commercial jobs I try to work on my own project, an ongoing thing I'm writing called **D'Adventures of 'I.S.R.A.E.L.I**. The current issue, *City of Night*, has been on my drawing board for three years now. It's become a kind of good luck talisman, because every time I get the chance to work on it, another paid job comes up. Besides, I like the irony of being unable to draw comics because I'm too busy drawing comics.

See ya in the funny pages.

Click on Globe returns to contents



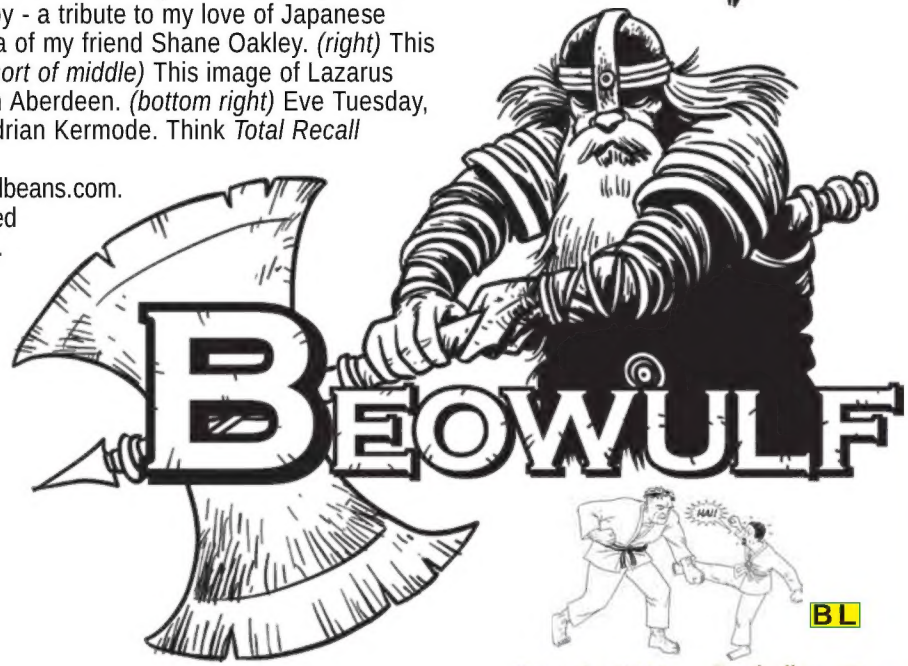


Matt Brooker
Trading as
D'Israeli
http://www.d-israeli.demon.co.uk

The Annotated D'Israeli

Matt Brooker's words for his pictures – Page 1: *(left)* The "brand identity" for D'Israeli. *(Below that)* A picture I drew for a friend's birthday card. *(bottom left)* Godzilla Vs Mecha Formby - a tribute to my love of Japanese rubber-suit monster movies. Mecha Formby was originally the good idea of my friend Shane Oakley. *(right)* This is James Autumn, gentleman adventurer and hero of **Scarlet Traces**. *(sort of middle)* This image of Lazarus Churchyard was for a limited edition print for Asylum Books & Games in Aberdeen. *(bottom right)* Eve Tuesday, chief protagonist of **The Nexialist**, a project I'm putting together with Adrian Kermode. Think *Total Recall* crossed with *Joe 90*, with sex!

This page: *(across the top)* This is from **Scarlet Traces**, my project for Coolbeans.com. Written by Ian Edginton, it's set in a London that's been rebuilt using adapted Martian technology, following the Martian invasion from **War of the Worlds**. Autumn and his batman, Archie Currie, in the thick of it in **Scarlet Traces** part 2. One of the original roughs for the pitch for **Scarlet Traces** - these were done in 1993, but the project wasn't sold to Coolbeans until 2000. In **Scarlet Traces**, the Victorians have adapted Martian technology, resulting in legged vehicles. This is a Hansom cab on spider legs *(bottom: from left to right)* A panel from my ongoing project, *City of Night*. This comic is part of my ongoing **D'Adventures of 'I.S.R.A.E.L.I.** project, the first part of which, *Consequences*, came out in 1999. This is the stuff I really want to work on, but it has to be fitted in between paying jobs, so I've been working on this comic for three years - still, every time I get a clear shot at working on it, more paid work comes up, so I'm keeping it on as a lucky mascot, if nothing else! *(right)* This is a logo design for the Beowulf RPG company in Aberdeen. *[Little pics' from Matt's sketchbook]*



YOUNG GUNS

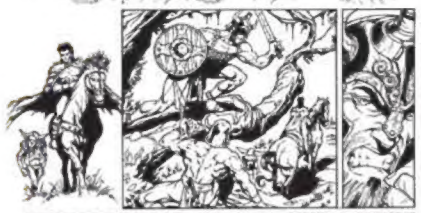
It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today, this month: **Ian Richardson**

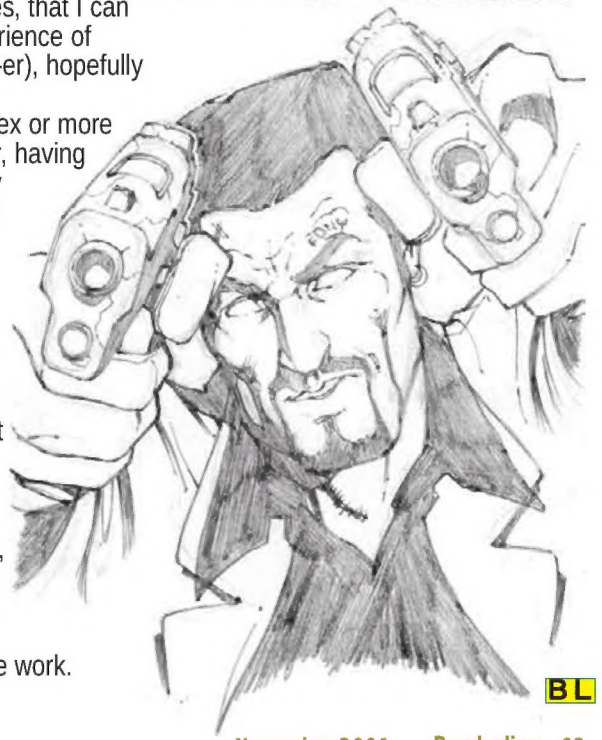
IAN RICHARDSON is a product of the Brit self-publishing scene, describing himself as "an ever persevering visitor to those lovely editorial ladies and gents at conventions. This is what led to my first work at **2000AD**. Went to see [then editor] Andy Diggle at the first DreddCon and it went on from there. See, boys and girls, it does work."

Ian's just finished another story for **2000AD** and is working on a 64 page Graphic Novel for US film/TV development company Platinum Studios, written by **Borderline**'s very own Paul Rainey. There are ongoing discussions with one or two of the major publishers, but nothing concrete he can tell you about right now.

"After getting those first commissions, now comes the prospect of turning this into a career. Whilst it's still important to carry on networking it's now for me to prove, after an editor has seen I can draw the pages, that I can be a professional. Keep deadlines and still turn out good quality work, basically make an editor's experience of dealing with me as pleasant and painless as possible. So next time they have an artistic slot to fill (oo-er), hopefully I'd be somewhere near the top of the list. It never stops being a learning experience.

"As for immediate goals; I'm just looking for the chance to work on a monthly book, be it spandex or more adult. Having the opportunity to work on a superhero book just appeals to the widescreen, blockbuster, having fun side of my brain. Whereas the chance to work on something, say, of a more Vertigo style definitely pushes buttons too, just of a different kind. I don't think I'd want to concentrate on one or the other; if I did I think I wouldn't learn as much about my job as I could and my chance to progress and become better at this would definitely suffer."





1. The *Sinister Dexter* story led to more work for **2000AD**, again with Dan Abnett. This is a page from a Future Shock he wrote, called *Raw Recruit*.
2. The Hawkeye piece is a bit of a personal experiment for me, trying out digital inking. Digital inking's a great idea - usually you draw a page three or four times in thumbnails then layouts then pencils then inks, so the image might lose a little freshness. With digital inks I can fix an image at the point I think it looks best. Plus, Hawkeye's an old favourite of mine, so if Joe Quesada's watching, I want Hawkeye!
3. This is a sample I did for DC, as part of what you could call "continuing discussions". Every artist'll tell you that breaking in is the most difficult thing in the world, but it's no good taking a rejection letter as a personal sign that you should give up. You've got to keep knocking on doors, sending in samples, keeping in contact with editors.
4. Like I said about keeping trying: eventually **2000AD** offered me a *Sinister Dexter* story to draw, and this was an early shot - ha ha - at Ramone Dexter, getting the character right in my head.
5. This *Slaine* page was done specifically as a sample page with the express intention of landing some work. Obviously it worked!

All pictures are clockwise from top left

WORLD OF HEROS

Chris Spicer & Rebecca Bonser's round-up of comics news that hasn't happened and isn't likely to...

FANTASTIC NEW TITLES FROM MARVEL

FOLLOWING its recent revamp of the Fantastic Four, Marvel is set to release a series of one-off specials, each featuring a different member of their First Family.

First up is a Mr Fantastic special. According to scripter Garth Ennis, it will feature a day in Reed Richards's life. "I'm working on a scene where he has to use special frictionless toilet paper to stop his bum stretching when he wipes," Ennis told us. "And when he goes for that booze-up with Thor – well, you'd better not read that scene on a full stomach!"

Next special will feature Richards's wife, Sue Storm, aka Invisible Woman. In keeping with the character, the polybagged, $8.95 issue will be printed in invisible ink on 32 completely transparent pages. Claims that Marvel are simply soliciting an empty bag have been fuelled by Bill Jemas's warning; "Careful when you open the comic, it might just slip through your fingers, and then you'll never see it again." Kurt Busiek will be scripting the completely see-through issue, drawing comments that this will probably be the most enjoyable comic he's ever written.

The third special will centre on Johnny Storm, the Human Torch. Scripter Devin Grayson told us, "You can expect lots of action as we turn up the heat on this hot-headed character! The art's gonna burn up the page, and the story's gonna be so fiery you'll need to read this wearing asbestos gloves! It'll be flamin' great!" When asked what the story would actually be about, Grayson said "You think with coming up with all these puns I've had time to think about the script? Aduh!"

Finally comes The Thing's solo special, which is being billed as a "wacky, slapstick, screwball comedy." Bill **Jemas** told us "One day, Ben Grimm **is** accidentally **mistaken** by a shortsighted building contractor **for** a small pile of masonry bricks, and I'm sure you can imagine what kind of hilarity ensues!" When we suggested it might be akin to the kind of hilarity usually encountered following the death of **a** well-loved family pet, we were asked to leave.

Asked if Marvel should really be pinning its fortunes on a group of overly familiar, overused characters, Head of Public Relations Avi Arad told us "I'm going to spit on your graves," before being heavily sedated prior to his shock therapy session.

WARREN ELLIS: NICE GUY SHOCKER!

WARREN Ellis, recently voted "Comic Writer Most Likely to Rip Off the Top of Your Head and Masturbate into Your Living Brain" by fans too terrified of him to do anything else, has built a reputation as being the scariest man in the comics industry, but shock reports have put that reputation in doubt after a fan who met Ellis described him as "pretty friendly."

Michael Carmichael, the fan in question, met Ellis at a recent signing. "He was okay," Carmichael told us. "I asked him to sign my comic, and he was like, yeah, no problem. We chatted for a bit, and I went. He seemed like a nice guy."

Ellis's fans, however, leapt to their idol's defence after his detractors seized the opportunity to lambast him, wittily nicknaming him Warren "Nice Guy" Ellis. Message board regular **Babyeater**thescreamingbitchqueen (who we later discovered is really named Helen) told us: "Ellis is not a nice guy! He'd rather shit on your comic than sign it! What's more, he steals from charity collection tins, ritually sacrifices guide dogs and kicks old ladies into oncoming traffic! Now get lost before I rip off your head and give it to a bunch of rabies-infested howler monkeys to use as a jizz bucket!"

We spoke to Ellis himself, who said: "I'm just a normal, regular guy. Sure, I write some weird stuff, but I'm friendly, polite and..." He probably completed that sentence, but by then we'd already fled in terror.

left: A pixelated picture of Warren Ellis

CHRIS CLAREMONT SPANKS MONKEY

IN BORDERLINE #2 we reported on how Chris Claremont, through years of overwriting, had used up all of the words allotted to him and could not write or say a thing. However, Claremont has still been turning in scripts. Now we can reveal the truth behind this mystery, thanks to exclusive information passed to us by a former aide of Claremont's. Claremont has found himself a ghost writer – an infinite number of monkeys!

"He keeps them locked up in a room with an infinite number of typewriters," our informant told us. "He motivates them to write by soundly and regularly beating them. A good slapping every morning soon gets the little buggers typing away. It's much more effective than actually feeding or watering them.

"Mostly the monkeys produce gobbledegook," the aide continued. "But occasionally one of them writes something of genuine literary quality. Chris throws that in the trash and submits the gobbledegook to Marvel. I remember one time, one of the monkeys produced the entire works of Shakespeare. So Chris took a tyre iron and broke its little hands."

At this point our informant had to leave, citing a previous appointment. "I've got to go get myself deloused," he said.

Claremont has released a personal statement denying all knowledge. It read: "I have never abused a monkey, either my own or anyone else's." The statement went on to request a visit by a representative of the World Wildlife Fund, and a crate of bananas.

Right: some of Claremont's ghost writers react to the news going public!

HOLD THE BACK PAGE

Your comments and letters

Phil Rushton *philcomm55@yahoo.co.uk*

PERHAPS somebody else can advise me on the best way to respond to stuff in **Borderline**. This question occurred to me as I was reading Mike Kidson's intriguing article on the representation of speed in comic strips, and started to think of additional points that arose from it.

Going by the letters section in #2 it seems unlikely that LOCs sent to the editorial address will ever see the light of day unless Phil decides to publish a 56-page supplement every month. On the other hand comments sent to the old **ci** Yahoogroup site are more likely to be read and to elicit a response, but are not going to be seen by the majority of **Borderline**'s readership. I suppose the obvious answer is to direct such contributions to the new **Borderline** Yahoogroup, but that doesn't seem to have gathered much momentum yet – in fact one could argue that the two sites are actually competing for content, with the longer established one still attracting the lion's share.

It's just a thought, but I wonder if the Borderline site would become more active if relevant excerpts from messages posted here were to appear there as well - possibly as a result of some kind of editorial selection?

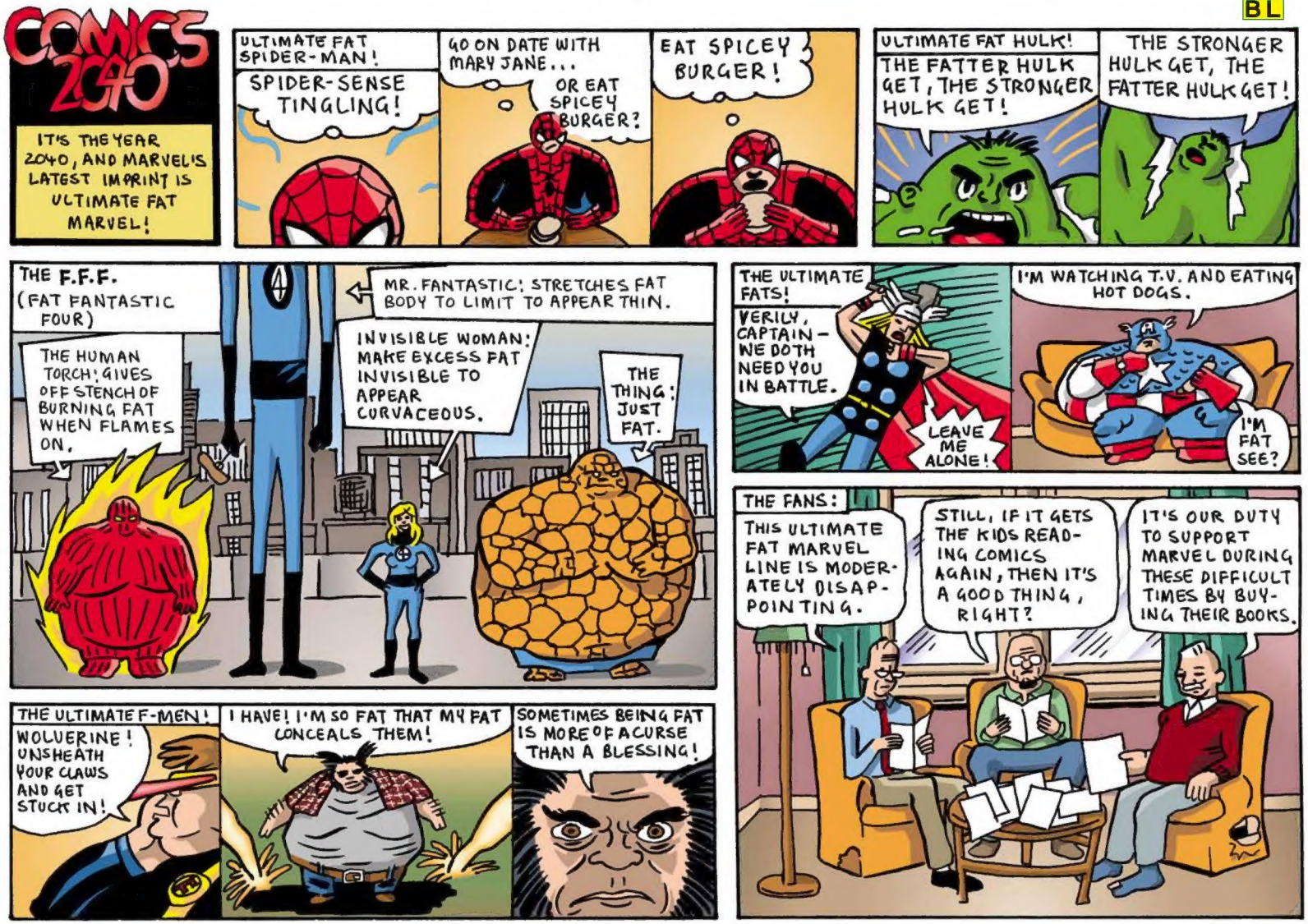
One of the things that we've probably been neglecting since starting this magazine is the internet's presence and influence on us. We are born of this electronic medium and yet since the commitment to dedicating time to the production of the magazine, no one has had the time to immerse themselves in the internet side of things. Something we're planning on rectifying soon.

But that's not to say we haven't been addressing the situation. We appreciate that there are still many areas of the world that aren't even aware of us, or are concerned about the format or the delivery or whatever. So, over the next couple of months we're going to be making changes to things. You may have all noticed that the webpage has changed and we're going to be launching our Delphi Forum in the next few weeks, there are also plans for a Topica board and we've been approached by a couple of our affiliates about having ***Borderline*** *Message Boards with them. So, we're not sitting still. However, when I was at* ***Comics International*** *one of that magazine's ethics was "we're not as important as what we're reporting on" and that is something that has followed me here. So regardless of how much internet presence we have, what's important is that we spread the word of 'comics' throughout the world!*

So a reminder to all our readers, there's a number of different places to discuss ***Borderline*** *or comics in general: Delphi Forum: http://forums.delphi.com/BorderlineTCM/start; Yahoogroup Discussion: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/borderline_magazine; or to find out about the latest issue join up to:* ***Borderline****'s Announcement Only list: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Borderline-announce.*

... There's more, just no room this month!

BL


COMICS 2040
IT'S THE YEAR 2040, AND MARVEL'S LATEST IMPRINT IS ULTIMATE FAT MARVEL!
ULTIMATE FAT SPIDER-MAN!
SPIDER-SENSE TINGLING!
GO ON DATE WITH MARY JANE...
OR EAT SPICEY BURGER?
EAT SPICEY BURGER!
ULTIMATE FAT HULK!
THE FATTER HULK GET, THE STRONGER HULK GET!
THE STRONGER HULK GET, THE FATTER HULK GET!
THE F.F.F. (FAT FANTASTIC FOUR)
THE HUMAN TORCH: GIVES OFF STENCH OF BURNING FAT WHEN FLAMES ON.
MR. FANTASTIC: STRETCHES FAT BODY TO LIMIT TO APPEAR THIN.
INVISIBLE WOMAN: MAKE EXCESS FAT INVISIBLE TO APPEAR CURVACEOUS.
THE THING: JUST FAT.
THE ULTIMATE FATS!
VERILY, CAPTAIN – WE DOTH NEED YOU IN BATTLE.
LEAVE ME ALONE!
I'M WATCHING T.V. AND EATING HOT DOGS.
I'M FAT SEE?
THE ULTIMATE F-MEN!
WOLVERINE! UNSHEATH YOUR CLAWS AND GET STUCK IN!
I HAVE! I'M SO FAT THAT MY FAT CONCEALS THEM!
SOMETIMES BEING FAT IS MORE OF A CURSE THAN A BLESSING!
THE FANS:
THIS ULTIMATE FAT MARVEL LINE IS MODERATELY DISAPPOINTING.
STILL, IF IT GETS THE KIDS READING COMICS AGAIN, THEN IT'S A GOOD THING, RIGHT?
IT'S OUR DUTY TO SUPPORT MARVEL DURING THESE DIFFICULT TIMES BY BUYING THEIR BOOKS.